the weekly Standard

SEPTEMBER 3, 2007 • $3.95

DEMOLISHING AL QAEDA
MARIO LOYOLA REPORTS FROM IRAQ

INSIDE:

The War Over Vietnam

- Matthew Continetti
- William Kristol
- Philip Terzian

THE HORROR! THE HORROR!

NOEMIE EMERY on the paranoid style of the American left

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—William Howell, Martin West, and Paul Peterson

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—Stefanie DeLuca

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

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BPA INTERNATIONAL

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The Life of the Ivy League Mind

One of The Scrapbook's undergraduate friends pointed us to an amusing webcast from a Cornell freshman orientation event—or perhaps that should be indoctrination event (viewable at *reading.cornell.edu/panel_discussions.htm*). It was a discussion of a novel assigned to all new students for summer reading, Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*. The purpose of the assignment, according to Cornell's website, was to stress "the intellectual benefits of reading" to incoming freshmen at the Ivy League institution.

The Pickup tells the story of an interracial romance in post-apartheid South Africa. Julie, a wealthy, progressive white girl, falls in love with Ibrahim, an illegal immigrant Muslim who fixes cars. When Ibrahim is deported to his unnamed home country, Julie goes with him and "finds herself." Vice Provost Michele Moody-Adams explained that this book will "speak to the . . . contemporary experience of our incoming students who are thinking about sort of how to find themselves in college." Judging by the farcical discussion that ensued, it didn't speak to them very loudly.

An English professor deplores Julie's friends and family members, who are not progressive enough. A law professor who helps illegal immigrants and Muslim-Americans who claim discrimination bemoans inequality between "global haves and have-nots." Students yawn, chat, listen to iPods. More than one's eyes are half closed.

An African American studies professor then asks how many didn't like the book. The room erupts in cheers and a majority raise their hands. Moody-Adams is dismayed.

She opens the floor to student comments. One life sciences student remarks that the "diversity" cause is too fashionable and insinuates that the book's message is superficial. A shaggy-haired, well-spoken white boy says he was disappointed in *The Pickup* and thinks it was trivial compared with other books the administration could have chosen, such as the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Guns of August* by Barbara Tuchman, a survey of events leading to WWI. "I don't know if any of you have ever read it," he says to the panel with a smirk—no response. Two black girls say that while the book brought up important issues, it was simply boring.

Given the tenor of this discussion, perhaps we don't have to worry about liberal indoctrination, after all. Moody-Adams said the book would be particularly useful to Cornell students because beginning Cornell is like moving to a new country. The Scrapbook would have to agree. ♦

Survey Says . . .

"U.S. Losing War on Terror, Experts Say in Survey," reads the headline of an August 21 article from NPR's popular Morning Edition program. As you might imagine, this got The Scrapbook's attention.

The survey was conducted by the folks at *Foreign Policy* magazine and the lefty Center for American Progress, a holding pen for Clinton administration wonks that supports American withdrawal from Iraq. Characteristically, NPR describes the Center for American Progress merely as a "Washington think tank."

It gets worse. The list was clearly tilted to the left of the political spectrum, which meant the views of participants James Woolsey, Aaron Friedberg, and Weekly Standard contributing editor Robert Kagan were drowned out in a sea of anti-Bush opinion. Among the "more than 100 foreign-policy experts" *Foreign Policy* and the Center for American Progress surveyed? Noted Iraq war opponents such as Richard Clarke, Larry Johnson, Larry Korb, Mary McCarthy, William Odom, Paul Pillar, Shibley Telhami, Stephen Walt, and Michael Scheuer. Add to that Democratic fixers like Madeleine Albright, Dan Benjamin, Steve Simon, Joe Cirincione, Tony Lake, Robert Malley, Gary Hart, and Susan Rice. With "experts" like these, who needs partisans? ♦

John Edwards's Cuba Ignorance

The latest installment of "If Bush had said it . . . " comes courtesy of John Edwards, Democratic presidential hopeful and staunch advocate of universal health care. As reported by Rick Klein on the ABC News "Political Radar" blog earlier this month:

> When an Iowa resident asked former senator John Edwards Thursday whether the United States should follow the Cuban healthcare model, the 2004 vice presidential contender deflected the question by saying he didn't know enough to answer the question.
>
> "I'm going to be honest with you—I don't know a lot about Cuba's healthcare system," Edwards, D-N.C., said at an event in Oskaloosa, Iowa. "Is it a government-run system?"
>
> But just three days earlier, the candidate was asked a question about the Michael Moore documentary Sicko—which focuses extensively on the Cuban healthcare system.
>
> As Willie Nelson's classic "On the

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(Classic Steiner, reprinted from our issue of December 11, 1995)

Road Again" blared, Edwards leaned out of a window of his campaign bus dubbed "Fighting for One America," to hear an off-camera voice howl, "I wanted to ask ya, is it required that everyone go see Fahrenheit 9/11 and Sicko?"

Edwards, in between autographs outside Dan's Pizzeria in Onawa, Iowa, replies, "I watched Sicko," later adding, "It's a great movie." . . .

Is this a cinematic flip flop? Another hairy situation for the Edwards camp? As they say in the NFL, after further review, ABC News says it may not be so. With the help of our able colleagues at ABC News Radio, we isolated the audio, enhancing it to hear a key phrase that Edwards says between his claim of seeing Sicko and proclaiming it "a great movie."

In the exchange, barely audible over the twang of Willie, Edwards adds, "I didn't quite get to see the end." While not a silver bullet, the exchange begs the question: does one really need to see the end of Sicko to know that communist Cuba provides government-run healthcare?

THE SCRAPBOOK, for its part, is confident John Edwards will reject Castro's health care system—the instant he learns that you can't sue doctors in Cuba. ♦

The View from Hollywood

Not a parody: "Of all the things that fill a filmmaker with dread, huge applause at the end of a test screening isn't usually one of them. But director Peter Berg started to worry when he showed his new movie, *The Kingdom*, to an audience in California farm country. About two hours into the high-voltage political thriller—about a group of FBI operatives (played by Jamie Foxx, Jennifer Garner, Chris Cooper, and Jason Bateman) investigating a terrorist attack in Saudi Arabia—the packed house went completely bonkers, erupting in cheers when the Americans gun down a group of jihadists. Most directors would have started popping the champagne. But Berg was thoroughly freaked. 'I was nervous it would be perceived as a jingoistic piece of propaganda, which I certainly didn't intend,' says the actor-turned-director, hunched over an outdoor table at a shabby Santa Monica coffeehouse. 'I thought, Am I experiencing American bloodlust?'"

—*Entertainment Weekly*, August 24, 2007

She Could've Been Worse

"You've got to say this for Leona Helmsley: She had nothing to do with global warming and she never got us into war."

—*Gail Collins on the recently deceased "Queen of Mean" Leona Helmsley in the August 21* New York Times

Help Wanted

THE WEEKLY STANDARD has a full-time position available for an editorial assistant. Duties will include answering phones and emails, updating our website, research, and proofreading. Candidates should address a cover letter and résumé to hr@weeklystandard.com. ♦

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Casual

Guano in Georgetown

Not long ago my wife, daughter, and I were driving along M Street in Georgetown, just past Wisconsin Avenue, when my wife gestured in the direction of an ancient building on the south side of M Street, now an elegant boutique.

"Isn't that where you had your first job?" she asked.

"Not my first job," I answered, "but my first job after graduating from college."

At this point my daughter was intrigued—all right, amused—by the idea that her father had once labored in a pricey dress shop. But in fact, the building had not always been a dress shop; and, as I explained as we drove out M Street toward Key Bridge, it's an interesting story.

Interesting, and instructive, too. Thirty-four summers ago the building, which had been constructed around 1800, had been vacant for a quarter-century. It had once been home to whatever the Bureau of Indian Affairs was called during the Madison administration (or so I was told) and had served variously as federal offices, a brothel, and, between 1881 and 1947, a firehouse. There were two arched entrances, through which the hook-and-ladder had been driven, and a giant hole in the second floor where the pole had been.

One day, late in the spring of 1973, a former classmate of mine called and asked if I wanted to make a little money. I had just been awarded my bachelor's degree, but had not yet begun laboring at the Reuters Washington bureau. I had already rented a small, slightly seedy, flat in the city and, indeed, could use an infusion of capital.

Sure, I replied.

A onetime employer of my friend had undertaken some grandiose (and ultimately ill-fated) project to establish a national firefighting museum, and had gotten a grant to lease the building. In the meantime, the old firehouse, which had been unoccupied for 26 years, had to be cleaned out. That was where my friend and I came in.

It had not occurred to me to ask what happens inside old buildings in 26 years. But the next morning, when we were presented with a shovel and breathing mask, I had a sudden inkling. In the course of two-and-a-half decades, the charming old Federal-era structure had become the repository of an untold quantity (usually knee-deep) of pigeon feces.

"The Old Firehouse"

LEV NISNEVITCH / THE WEEKLY STANDARD

I don't know whether my memory exaggerates, but I recall a particularly hot day. The second floor, which contained several rooms and a couple of short staircases, boasted a two-foot accumulation of dry, powdery stuff, augmented by stray feathers and bones. But the roof had developed a series of leaks over time, so the third floor featured a moist version of the substance, much heavier and more difficult to maneuver.

We were blessed in one respect. That giant hole where the firemen's pole had been located allowed us to drop a huge cloth into a dumpster on the ground floor, so we merely had to push the stuff over the side of the hole and into the dumpster. This produced a cloud of ungodly (not to say disease-ridden) pigeon dust, which easily penetrated our modest protection.

The third floor was a different matter: Each shovelful had to be carefully transported down corridors and slippery steps before being pitched overboard. We had been joined that morning by a jolly hippie-type who regarded us with a mixture of condescension and pot-fueled amusement. His work ethic, shall we say, left something to be desired—there were innumerable cigarette breaks and mysterious absences—and by the time we graduated to the third floor, he was on permanent sabbatical. Too bad, I remember thinking; I would like to have emptied my shovel onto his fun-loving head.

In the fullness of time, I am happy to report, the job was completed, and I can still feel the joy with which we staggered out onto M Street a pair of free men. I admit that my pleasure was reduced a little when handed a check for the day's effort—$18 in my memory, perhaps a bit more—and returning to my squalid apartment that evening I stood in the shower, just stood there and rinsed, for a very long time.

In recounting this seminal incident to my daughter, I tried to recall what lessons I learned that day. First, I was reminded of the dignity of labor: Work may not always be pleasurable, or very interesting, but done conscientiously is its own reward. Those 18 dollars were rightfully earned.

Second, I confirmed in my mind that manual labor was never my calling, and that working at a desk, and wearing a tie every day, suited me fine. After eight sweat-stained hours of immersion in pigeon byproducts, every subsequent job has seemed rather pleasant.

Philip Terzian

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The KGB in Copenhagen

As the target of Lars Hedegaard's article "The KGB's Man in Copenhagen" (August 20 / August 27), I am tempted to send a long rebuttal. But reasonable readers have probably by themselves already found it to be ludicrous. It defies credulity that the Danish center-right political establishment and Danish intelligence would protect the alleged no. 1 agent for the KGB.

The basic charges were originally raised by KGB defector Oleg Gordievsky in 1982. They were investigated for years. Danish police did not even attempt to charge me. The "case" was not deemed serious enough to be brought to the attention of what was then a conservative minister of justice. In 1992, Gordievsky repeated his charges publicly in a Danish newspaper. A high court in 1994 ruled on my behalf. I got a total retraction by the newspaper and the court awarded me what was, by Danish standards, very high compensation. Gordievsky has made accusations against a large number of people; extremely few prosecutions, if any at all, have followed. Among the people suing successfully after such accusations are the former UK Labour leader Michael Foot and the former NATO general secretary Lord Robertson.

Contrary to what is claimed in the article, I was an ardent critic of the Danish Communist Party and the Soviet Union. Files from the East German secret police, Stasi, classify me as an "anti-Communist" and as a possible CIA agent. In my campaign for the release of my wife, many officials and politicians participated. Other spouses have been allowed to leave after similar pressure, so my alleged blackmail of the KGB is not as unique as it is claimed. The detailed rebuttal of the charges made in the article will, again, take place in the Danish courts.

Joergen Dragsdahl
Ballerup, Denmark

Lars Hedegaard responds: Joergen Dragsdahl has got one thing right. It is hard to understand why the Danish political establishment should have protected the KGB's no. 1 in Copenhagen. As for the rest of his rebuttal, he is either ill informed, very forgetful, or something worse.

Dragsdahl must have forgotten that in cases involving sensitive relations with foreign powers, such as espionage, it is always up to the minister of justice to bring charges. It is not for the public prosecutor to decide, as Dragsdahl implies. There can be no doubt that the justice minister was informed of his case, but for reasons that have yet to be explained, the government decided not to make waves.

There was no "high court" ruling in 1994 following a series of articles in the Copenhagen daily *Ekstra Bladet* with the same basic conclusion as Prof. Bent Jensen reached many years later. Dragsdahl sued for libel, and the paper had to settle out of court because the Social Democratic minister of justice would not permit it to use the relevant documents in the archives of the intelligence service. Consequently, there was no trial and no sentence. Nor has any Danish court awarded Dragsdahl compensation.

As for Dragsdahl, the supposed anti-Communist and possible CIA agent, suffice it to mention that the KGB did not believe the paranoid speculations of the Stasi. Neither did the hard core of the Danish Communist party, from which he was able to solicit support for his campaign to get his wife out of the Soviet Union.

Dragsdahl is keen to smear the reputation of Oleg Gordievsky, who in June of this year was appointed Companion of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George (CMG) for "services to the security of the United Kingdom" on the occasion of the Queen's birthday. But if Dragsdahl thinks back to his conversation with Danish intelligence in 1986, he will recall that it had managed to confirm Gordievsky's information through its own observations of conspiratorial meetings in Denmark and abroad.

Obviously, Dragsdahl is supremely confident that the Danish government will once again deny his opponents in the new libel suit the use of relevant documents. It remains to be seen if he has reason to be optimistic.

Correction

A quotation in the article "The Ultimate Export Control" (July 23, 2007) from a vice president of the company TRI-Rinse—"One of the ways to make sure that no one will ever use an F-14 again is to cut them into little 2-by-2-foot bits"—should have been credited to Associated Press reporter Sharon Theimer.

• • •

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The Left Shudders

Like a pig in muck, the left loves to wallow in Vietnam. But only in their "Vietnam." Not in the real Vietnam war.

Not in the Vietnam war of 1963-68, the disastrous years where policy was shaped by the best and brightest of American liberalism. Not in the Vietnam war of 1969-73, when Richard Nixon and General Creighton Abrams managed to adjust our strategy, defeat the enemy, and draw down American troops all at once—an achievement affirmed and rewarded by the American electorate in November 1972. Not in the Vietnam of early 1975, when the Democratic Congress insisted on cutting off assistance to our allies in South Vietnam and Cambodia, thereby inviting the armies of the North and the Khmer Rouge to attack. And not in the defeats of April 1975. As the American left celebrated from New York to Hollywood, in Phnom Penh former Cambodian prime minister Sirik Matak wrote to John Gunther Dean, the American ambassador, turning down his offer of evacuation:

> Dear Excellency and Friend:
>
> I thank you very sincerely for your letter and for your offer to transport me towards freedom. I cannot, alas, leave in such a cowardly fashion. As for you, and in particular for your great country, I never believed for a moment that you would have this sentiment of abandoning a people which has chosen liberty. You have refused us your protection, and we can do nothing about it. You leave, and my wish is that you and your country will find happiness under this sky. But, mark it well, that if I shall die here on the spot and in my country that I love, it is no matter, because we all are born and must die. I have only committed this mistake of believing in you [the Americans].
>
> Please accept, Excellency and dear friend, my faithful and friendly sentiments.
>
> S/Sirik Matak

The Khmer Rouge took Phnom Penh a few days later. Sirik Matak was executed: shot in the stomach, he was left without medical help and took three days to die. Between 1 and 2 million Cambodians were murdered by the Khmer Rouge in the next three years. Next door, tens of thousands of Vietnamese were killed, and many more imprisoned. Hundreds of thousands braved the South China Sea to reach freedom.

The United States welcomed the refugees—but we were in worldwide retreat. It turned out that the USSR was sufficiently tired and ramshackle that its attempts to take advantage of that retreat had limited success. Still, the damage done by U.S. weakness in the late 1970s should not be underestimated. To mention only one event, our weakness made possible the first successful Islamist revolution in the modern world in Iran in 1979, in the course of which we allowed a new Iranian government to hold 52 Americans hostage for 444 days.

The era of weakness ended with the American public's repudiation of Jimmy Carter in 1980. Vietnam played a cameo role in that presidential campaign. In August of 1980, speaking to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Ronald Reagan personally added the following thoughts on Vietnam to the prepared text of a defense policy speech: "As the years dragged on, we were told that peace would come if we would simply stop interfering and go home. It is time we recognized that ours was, in truth, a noble cause. . . . There is a lesson for all of us in Vietnam. If we are forced to fight, we must have the means and determination to prevail."

The media went nuts. What a gaffe! Howell Raines, writing a week later in the *New York Times*, wondered if the Vietnam comments, which had "provided ammunition for his critics," marked "perhaps the turn in Ronald Reagan's luck and in the momentum of his campaign"—a negative turn, Raines meant and hoped.

But it was not to be. Reagan stood by his guns. He beat Jimmy Carter. And all honor to George W. Bush for following in Reagan's footsteps, grasping the nettle, and confronting the real lessons and consequences of Vietnam. The liberal media and the PC academics are horrified. All the better.

As the left shudders, Bush leads. In his speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars 27 years after Reagan's, Bush also told the truth about Vietnam. Now he has to be steadfast in supporting General Petraeus and ensuring that the war is fought as intelligently and energetically as possible. Not everyone in his administration is as fully committed to this task as they should be. Bush will have to be an energetic and effective commander in chief, both abroad and on the home front, over his final 17 months. Last week was a good start.

—*William Kristol*

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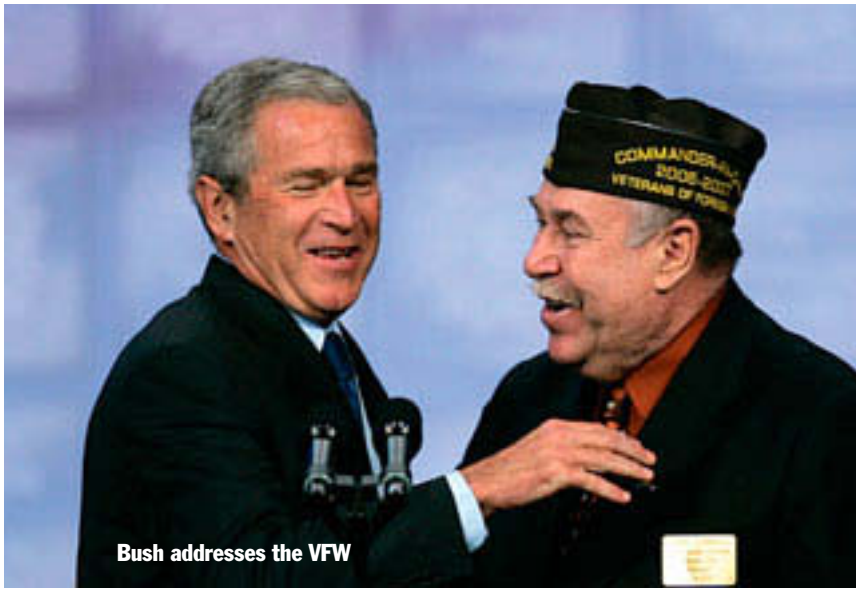
Hands Off My Analogy

Liberals object when Bush discusses Vietnam

BY MATTHEW CONTINETTI



Bush addresses the VFW

On August 22, at the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention in Kansas City, Missouri, President Bush delivered a 43-minute speech in which he compared the war in Iraq, and America's war on Islamic terrorism in general, to the three large 20th-century U.S. military interventions in Asia. The most controversial section of Bush's speech was 15 paragraphs likening those who claimed that America was the problem in Vietnam and that "if we would just withdraw, the killing would end" to those who today are saying similar things about Iraq. Bush's speech received an enthusiastic response from the audience, which frequently burst into applause (some 36 times, according to the White House transcript). Advocates of American withdrawal from Iraq were far less enthusiastic about the comparison of Iraq to Vietnam. Which is curious, as opponents of the war have been comparing that conflict to Vietnam since at least 2002, long before Saddam was deposed.

Anyone familiar with American politics over the last six years knows the important role the Vietnam trope has played in the Iraq debate. A search for *New York Times* articles in which "Iraq" appears within ten words of "Vietnam" brings up 989 hits between January 1, 2002, and August 24, 2007. Until this speech, the president had rejected comparisons between Iraq and Vietnam, so one might think those Iraq critics who have used the Vietnam analogy in the past would welcome Bush's admission of a parallel, however limited, between the two wars. But one would be incorrect, because apparently the only legitimate lessons from Vietnam are those that conform to the antiwar worldview.

Bush's argument is uncharacteristically constrained. He acknowledged that Vietnam is a "complex and painful subject for many Americans." He conceded that the "tragedy of Vietnam is too large to be contained in one speech." He recognized that "there is a legitimate debate about how we got into the Vietnam War and how we left." Yet he also cautioned that "one unmistakable legacy of Vietnam is that the price of America's withdrawal was paid by millions of innocent citizens whose agonies would add to our vocabulary new terms like 'boat people,' 'reeducation camps,' and 'killing fields.'"

In Bush's view, there is a second "unmistakable legacy" of American withdrawal from Vietnam—or, perhaps more accurately, of the cessation of American aid to the South Vietnamese government in 1975, which guaranteed the North's victory. (American combat troops left Vietnam in 1973.) This second legacy, Bush said, can be heard "in the words of the enemy we face in today's struggle—those who came to our soil and killed thousands of citizens on September 11, 2001." Bush quoted from statements that Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri have made about how America's defeat in Vietnam exposed it as a weak power. "Here at home," the president concluded, "some can argue that our withdrawal from Vietnam carried no price to American credibility—but the terrorists see it differently."

In what may have been the oddest response to the VFW speech, Hillary Clinton did not even mention Bush's reference to Vietnam: "The surge was designed to give the Iraqi government time to take steps to ensure a political solution to the situation," Clinton said. "It has failed to do so. . . . We need to stop refereeing the war, and start getting out now." (What made Clinton's response especially odd was that 48 hours earlier she had told the VFW that the surge was showing signs of progress.) Barack Obama at least acknowledged "the disastrous consequences described by President Bush," but argued that they are "already in motion" and that "there is no military solution to Iraq's prob-

AP / CHARLIE RIEDEL

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lems." America is powerless to stop the killing.

Speaking chronologically, of course, Obama's argument makes no sense. An event cannot have consequences before it occurs. In his speech, Bush warns that "if we were to abandon the Iraqi people," then the global jihadist movement "would be emboldened," "gain new recruits," and perhaps establish a "safe haven" from which it could launch attacks on America. Now it's possible that Bush is wrong about these consequences. But we wouldn't know whether he is until after America has left—something that has not happened and is unlikely to happen as long as he is president.

Another set of critics argued that it was impolitic of Bush to bring up Vietnam. This was a line often repeated in media reporting on the VFW speech. A *Time* magazine web article had the headline: "Bush's Risky Vietnam Gambit." The *Washingtonpost.com* columnist Dan Froomkin said Bush had entered "risky rhetorical territory." The report in the print edition tut-tutted that Vietnam "remains a divisive, emotional issue for many Americans." Guest-hosting MSNBC's *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, Mike Barnicle asked, "What does the president have to gain by opening old wounds?" Senator John Kerry said "invoking the tragedy of Vietnam" was "irresponsible." And yet, during the entire debate over Iraq, opponents of intervention have brought up Vietnam frequently. When that happens, no one deems it "risky" or "irresponsible" of them to bring up this "divisive, emotional issue."

Bush's opponents viewed Iraq as another Vietnam long before the war began. The linkage of Iraq and Vietnam on the *New York Times* editorial page occurs as early as January 31, 2002: "Not since America's humiliating withdrawal from Vietnam more than a quarter-century ago has our foreign policy relied so heavily on non-nuclear military force, or the threat of it, to defend American interests around the world." An August 11, 2002, editorial on Iraq twice mentioned Vietnam. On August 28, 2002, in an editorial entitled "Summons to War," the *Times*'s editors wrote that Alberto Gonzales's "legal sophistry" was "reminiscent of Lyndon Johnson's use of the Tonkin Gulf resolution to authorize a disastrous land war in Vietnam."

In January 2003, the *Times*'s editors wrote that the "first lesson of the Vietnam era" was that "Americans should not be sent to die for aims the country only vaguely understands and accepts." The "second lesson of Vietnam" was that the "country should never enter into a conflict without a clear exit strategy." For Bush's foes, such lessons are nonnegotiable. They are sacrosanct.

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When war came in March 2003, the number of comparisons between Iraq and Vietnam grew, faded in the weeks following regime change, and then spiked once the war began to go badly. It was too much for Melvin Laird, secretary of defense in the Nixon administration, who penned a long article in the November/December 2005 *Foreign Affairs* attacking the phenomenon. "Those who wallow in such Vietnam angst would have us be not only reticent to help the rest of the world," Laird wrote, "but ashamed of our ability to do so and doubtful of the value of spreading democracy and of the superiority of freedom itself."

Those suffering from Vietnam angst, Laird wrote, think America was wrong in its intent in Indochina, wrong in its conduct, and eventually got what it had coming to it. They see the same things in America's intervention in Iraq. It's a view captured well by a September 14, 2002, letter to the editor of the *Times*:

> A United States war on Iraq reminds me of another act of United States aggression, our war in Vietnam, which had no recognizable moral reasoning but economic and militaristic appeal. The similarities between the two eras are striking. Yet Vietnam created no economic gain for the United States, engendered years of infighting in our own country and led to a legacy of distrust of the government among many. How can we be the moral arbiter of the world if we can't even admit to our own failings?

The letter helps us understand why Bush's VFW speech has generated so much controversy. It's not because he brought up the lessons of Vietnam. It's because he brought up lessons which the opponents of that war and the current one—who so often seem to be the same people—deem incorrect. "The president is drawing the wrong lesson from history," Ted Kennedy said in response to Bush. The lesson of Vietnam, according to Kennedy, is that America lost a war "because our troops were trapped in a distant country we did not understand, supporting a government that lacked sufficient legitimacy from its people." For those who've been paying attention to the Iraq war debate, that probably sounds like a familiar lesson.

"The president emphasized the violence in the wake of American withdrawal from Vietnam," former Clinton national security council staffer Steven Simon told the *Wall Street Journal*. "But this happened because the United States left too late, not too early. . . . It was the expansion of the war that opened the door to Pol Pot and the genocide of the Khmer Rouge." Here is another "lesson" from Vietnam that, if true, would tend to support war opponents calling for America to leave Iraq.

Suddenly things become perfectly clear. Bush's opponents don't have a problem with Vietnam analogies. They have a problem with Vietnam analogies that undermine the case for American withdrawal. They see Vietnam as the exclusive property of the antiwar movement. ♦

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A Novel Interpretation

Bush understands Graham Greene better than his critics. BY PHILIP TERZIAN

"The argument that America's presence in Indochina was dangerous had a long pedigree. In 1955, long before the United States had entered the war, Graham Greene wrote a novel called The Quiet American. *It was set in Saigon, and the main character was a young government agent named Alden Pyle. He was a symbol of American purpose and patriotism—and dangerous naiveté. Another character describes Alden this way: 'I never knew a man who had better motives for all the trouble he caused.'*

"After America entered the Vietnam War, the Graham Greene argument gathered some steam. As a matter of fact, many argued that if we pulled out there would be no consequences for the Vietnamese people."

—President Bush, addressing the Veterans of Foreign Wars, August 22

When George W. Bush introduced Graham Greene and *The Quiet American* into his argument about Vietnam and the Iraq war, he must have felt a little like Ivan Pavlov tantalizing his dogs. Sure enough, within minutes of completing his speech at the VFW convention, the salivation began.

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Frank James of the *Chicago Tribune* adopted a passive-aggressive voice to advance the standard progressive theory that Bush is a dangerous marionette:

Thomas Fowler (Michael Redgrave), the worldly-wise Englishman

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> Even more astonishing is that Bush's speechwriters included in the president's speech a mention of the very fictional character some of the president's critics have used for years to lambaste him for what they consider a major strategic blunder.

To which the redoubtable Joe Klein of *Time* added this elegant thought:

> I love that the President's (or his speechwriter's) book-reading yielded a reference in the speech to Graham Greene's splendid *The Quiet American*. . . . I would hope that the President will re-read, or perhaps just read the book, as soon as possible because it is as good a description as there is about the futility of trying to forcibly impose western ways on an ancient culture.

One last example is supplied by the editor of *Editor & Publisher*, the newspaper trade magazine, who complained that

> Bush cited my favorite 20th century novel and its author . . . in his speech on Wednesday that drew several dubious links between the catastrophic Vietnam and Iraq conflicts. Perhaps because it's unlikely he's ever read the book it was difficult to figure out exactly what the president meant.

No, it wasn't. Bush's meaning is clear, and bears repeating.

The Quiet American is set in Saigon after the French have withdrawn and before the Americans have arrived. Its narrator is a cynical, hard-drinking British journalist named Thomas Fowler, and its protagonist is a crew-cut American embassy official named Alden Pyle. Since this is a British novel and its author is Graham Greene, Fowler is a complicated, worldly-wise Englishman while Pyle is an earnest, buffoonish Yank. Pyle, who wants South Vietnam to enjoy the benefits of American-style democracy, does not quite comprehend the local culture, and his bumptious efforts yield more misery than success. Fowler, who represents a marriage between Greene's Catholic fatalism and lost dreams of empire, is at once bemused and repelled by Pyle—and, ultimately, betrays him to the Communists.

It is not too difficult to discern Greene's intent here: The road to hell is paved with good intentions, and heroes (Fowler or Pyle) are invariably flawed. Fowler is shrewd enough to

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observe Pyle and his ilk with a jaundiced eye, but is an ignoble figure. Pyle has all the attractions—and the dangerous naiveté—of the idealist.

The Quiet American suffers from two misfortunes. First, it is an instructive example of what happens when an artist pollutes his work with contemporary politics: Graham Greene was infinitely more successful at this than, say, Gore Vidal; but the impulse to create fiction in the service of ideology is invariably detrimental to the fiction. *The Quiet American* is a good novel but well below Greene's standard.

Its second misfortune is that it has been misread by journalists, in America and elsewhere, in their search for an inexpensive form of sophistication. It is very easy, and very appealing, to adopt Fowler's stylish nihilism when contemplating the chaos of the modern world: At the global cocktail party, who would not wish to be the tipsy cynic, glass in hand, who baits the faithful enthusiast, Pyle? But it is also lazy and feckless. Even Graham Greene might have hesitated to apply the lessons of his mid-1950s Indochina to the circumstances of the 21st-century Middle East.

For the fact is that, Thomas Fowler notwithstanding, Alden Pyle's instincts were correct. Indochina did *not* live happily ever after the American withdrawal: Hundreds of thousands were murdered, millions were imprisoned and exiled, and the misery spread from Saigon to Laos and Cambodia. Graham Greene may have eased his conscience by rendering Fowler antiheroic, but he drew the wrong conclusion by excoriating Pyle.

It is a popular instinct, especially among journalists, to confront the ideological struggles of the world—and the politicians, like George W. Bush, who must contend with them—and retreat from commitment and take refuge, like Joe Klein and the editor of *Editor & Publisher*, in cheap irony and contempt. But the results are indifference and ignorance, and people die. It must be particularly galling that George W. Bush understands this. ♦

Hollywood Witness

Jon Voight, Whittaker Chambers fan.

BY FRED BARNES

In his mind's eye, Jon Voight can see the scene unfolding. Tall, self-assured Alger Hiss is waiting in the witness room to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) when a short, overweight man wearing a rumpled suit enters the room. It's Whittaker Chambers, who has accused Hiss of spying for the Soviets while a top State Department official. Chambers has confessed to being Hiss's Communist handler. So what does Hiss, having denied he knows Chambers, do? He looks unflustered, indifferent, and doesn't make eye contact. It is a scene with no dialogue, yet one brimming with all the tension and portent of the greatest spy case of the century.

Voight believes the silent confrontation between adversaries would be a riveting moment in a movie version of *Witness*, Chambers's 1952 epic about his embrace of communism, his break, and his clash with Hiss and the establishment figures who rushed to Hiss's defense. Voight is an admirer of Chambers and *Witness*. But if the film is ever made, he'd play Hiss. Voight, as accomplished an actor as he is, knows he wouldn't be credible as Chambers.

In Hollywood, Voight is an unusual figure. He's a conservative. "I have to say, in this atmosphere, I would be," he told me. But he's not active in Republican campaigns or party politics. Voight is a political loner, and, in the description of an associate, a "conservative independent."

His interest is chiefly in a single issue, national security. He's a strong defender of President Bush and Vice President Cheney, says the 9/11 attacks might have been averted if the Patriot Act had been in effect then, believes Communists were "right at the root" of anti-Vietnam war protests in the 1960s, insists the war on terror is "real" and necessary, regards actor Matt Damon as a left-wing "propagandist," and thinks "our best ambassadors" in Iraq are "our troops who are rubbing shoulders" with Iraqis.

Voight played the secretary of defense in the recent hit *Transformers*. But his role as a zealous Mormon leader involved in the massacre in Utah of a wagon train of Christians on their way to California is weightier and more important. The movie, which opened around the country last week, is *September Dawn*. The massacre occurred on September 11, 1857.

The date—9/11, 150 years ago—"gives you a bit of a chill," Voight says. And he sees the film as a metaphor for today's Islamic jihadists. The fanatical Mormons who believed God justified the killing of men, women, and children were "very reflective of Wahabbis" who teach hatred of non-Muslims and claim God approves the murder of infidels. "This is a way to examine the anatomy of religious fanatics [and how they] rationalize a murderous act."

It's also a controversial way. Mormons are unhappy with *September Dawn* because it implicates church patriarch Brigham Young. The Mormon church denies Young ordered the massacre. Voight, however, says the evidence against Young is unas-

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sailable and the film's director, Christopher Cain, told the *Los Angeles Times* that "Young's dialogue was taken directly from speeches and documents."

"We're not pointing a finger at the Mormon church today," Voight says. Nor does the movie "have anything to do" with Mitt Romney's campaign for the Republican presidential nomination. Romney, the former Massachusetts governor, is a Mormon.

Some conservatives have attacked the film as a poor substitute for a movie about Islamic terrorists. "Why would Hollywood release a controversial feature film about alleged Mormon terrorists of 150 years ago while all but ignoring the dangerous Muslim terrorists of today?" asked Michael Medved, the columnist and talk radio host.

This is a sensitive point for Voight. He says an anti-jihadist movie would have trouble getting financing, perhaps due to fear it would provoke violent Muslim protests. "For me certainly, I was drawn to [*September Dawn*] the way I was drawn to *Rosewood*, which was about a massacre in a black town," he says. "Truth should be brought to every chapter of our history."

The only full-length movie so far about Islamic extremists is *United 93*, released last year. It recounts, in documentary style, how a few brave souls forced the fourth plane seized by terrorists on 9/11 to crash in Pennsylvania. Voight is eager to make another. "I look for films based on their relevance to what we're facing," he says. And what's relevant in his view is the totalitarian ideology of Islamic radicalism and the threat it poses to America.

If a movie has no purpose, Voight says, "I don't do it. . . . The great stories will reveal themselves." One that has was written by ex-Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell. His book, *Lone Survivor: The Eyewitness Account of Operation Redwing and the Lost Heroes of SEAL Team 10*, is the account of a mission in Afghanistan in 2005 to kill or capture a Taliban leader. Voight is now talking to Luttrell about basing a movie on his book.

Voight played John Paul II in the television film about the Polish pope and considers him one of the great heroes of the Cold War. Catholic priests "were the warriors against totalitarian regimes," he says.

Today Voight's heroes are American soldiers. "They know their responsibility," he told me. "They've heard the call to defend our country. They've stepped up. They've really demonstrated their bravery and character. I'm continuously awed. Thank God for these guys." In a separate interview, he said, "I would much rather hear from these guys than the people who are presenting the news on television on a daily basis."

Jon Voight

His take on the war against Islamists is similar to Bush's. "This is not like Vietnam where you had one enemy and where the war stops within borders," he says. "Now we have those in the world who are intent on destroying us. It is no longer a time when we can turn swords into ploughshares. I believe this is a different time. This is a war against terrorism, and the terrorism is real. [This war] is more against religious fanatics than politics. I have a great love for this country, and we should be united. We've put our lives on the line for the rest of the world."

The threat, he believes, is internal as well as foreign. "I certainly hope we're paying close attention to all those people crossing our borders who might be dangerous to us," he said in a Q-and-A with Hollywood writer Alan Laukhuf. "We know for sure there are cells in the United States that are ready to erupt. We know that Hezbollah is here; we know there are cells from different terrorist organizations that are here and operational and there are others waiting too. So listen, it's a serious business. It's wartime, guys . . . we can get complacent. We've got to all be alert now. We've got to be supportive of our troops for sure."

Voight has visited numerous military hospitals and bases. "I'm a latecomer to this," he says. When he talked to wounded soldiers at Walter Reed Army hospital in early August, he found "there are surprises. One is how positive these guys are. When you ask them if they'd do it again, they say yes. To a man, they want to go back to their units, even if they have only one leg. It's just overwhelming."

He recalls, word for word, what a Marine at Camp Pendleton, soon to ship out for Iraq, told him: "Hey, Jon, don't worry about us. We know what has to be done and we want to do it." Voight's reaction: "Wow! It's impossible not to be impressed."

In Hollywood, Voight is a dissident. He doesn't buy Hollywood's take on the anticommunism of the 1940s and 1950s. "It's easy to do a piece against Senator McCarthy," he says. "He was easy to take down."

People were "hurt" by the HUAC's hearings on Communist infiltration of Hollywood. "On the other hand, there is another side to it," he says. That's the side "so heartbreakingly written" by Whittaker Chambers in *Witness*. The movie industry appears to have little interest in Chambers's dramatic rejection of communism. But Voight isn't giving up on his dream. He has talked to Chambers's children about film rights. Jon Voight has made 62 films, but playing Alger Hiss in *Witness* might be his greatest role. ♦

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If You Build It, They Will Take It

Iowa's eminent domain reform is good but not great. BY JONATHAN V. LAST

Eminent domain appeared in the presidential campaign recently when Sen. John McCain addressed the Supreme Court's 2005 *Kelo* decision. In a speech in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, McCain called *Kelo* "one of the most alarming reductions of freedom in our lifetimes." In the course of defending property rights, McCain promised to appoint Supreme Court justices who would take the Constitution seriously and said he might "seek to amend the Constitution to protect private property rights in America."

To those who follow the issue, it was bracing stuff. The questions of how and when property may be taken for public use—and what constitutes just compensation when property is taken—are vital but technical. It's a rare day when they make their way into a politician's stump speech. The only hiccup came afterwards. In an interview with *Power Line*'s Paul Mirengoff, McCain pointed to Iowa as a good example of how states can and should respond to the *Kelo* decision. In reality, Iowa is a good example of how slippery eminent domain reform can be.

With its 5-4 *Kelo* decision, the High Court blessed the bad habit local governments have of seizing property from one private owner (think homeowners without political clout) and giving it to another private owner (think downtown real estate developer). The ostensible public purpose that provides the constitutional fig-leaf for such seizures is usually eliminating "blight" (which is in the eye of the beholder) and goosing tax revenues.

At the time of *Kelo*, Iowa had no special protections for property rights, but the decision prodded the state legislature. In the spring of 2006, it overwhelmingly passed a reform to prohibit takings for the sole purpose of increasing the tax base. But Democratic governor Tom Vilsack unexpectedly vetoed the bill. The legislature returned in a special session and overrode the governor's veto, 90-8.

When the Palms began toying with the idea of building a hog farm on their land, the Vedic city council made noises about seizing the farm and turning it into a public park.

The new legislation strengthened property rights in Iowa, but did not settle the issue altogether. There are the usual fights; in Des Moines, Brad Hamilton bought two boarded up—blighted—buildings five years ago. He renovated them and turned them into two businesses, a record store and a T-shirt printing shop. The city wants to condemn his land and use it for private development.

Then there's the case of Maharishi Vedic City (population 420), a town founded in 2001 by followers of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the Transcendental Meditation guru. The city government named Sanskrit the official language, adopted the use of an alternative currency (the Raam Mudra), and banned the sale of any food not grown organically. Bob Palm owns a 149-acre farm on Vedic's border. When he and his brothers began toying with the idea of building a hog farm on their land, the Vedic city council made noises about seizing the farm and turning it into a public park because, as the city's attorney told the Associated Press, "It would be a very difficult situation for the city if a hog confinement is built on its boundaries." The city has drafted a proposal to buy the farm and "if that plan fails, they expect to use eminent domain to force the sale of Palm's land."

The biggest eminent domain issue in Iowa is one specifically left open in the reform—the creation of artificial lakes. Across the state, but particularly in southern Iowa, municipalities have undertaken projects to create lakes. The new law provides that "If private property is to be condemned for development or creation of a lake, only that number of acres justified as necessary for a surface drinking water source, and not otherwise acquired, may be condemned."

But shenanigans abound. The 1,800-acre West Tarkio Lake project near Shenandoah, in Page County, is a striking example. A March 2006 exposé in the *Des Moines City View* detailed how, in 2001, Shenandoah officials began campaigning for a new lake on the grounds that it would provide an important water source for the county. As part of their initial research for the project, the town hired a well digging company and a laboratory to see if they could find alternative water sources underground. They did—the results showed a huge supply of safe water. But city officials never disclosed the existence of these documents. An anonymous tipster told a local citizens group about them, and when the group requested copies of the report, the city claimed they didn't exist. Only after the group hired a lawyer did the city produce the reports.

Sometimes the law does work.

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Near the town of Peru, the Madison County Lake Commission had been pushing for the creation of a lake since 2004 on the grounds that it would provide a valuable water source. They proposed a massive 2,500 acre body of water, displacing some 40 landowners. However, the project presented some interesting footnotes: 2,500 acres was much bigger than could possibly have been needed for drinking water. And then there was Doug Gross, a member of the Madison County Lake Commission. Gross was the Republican candidate for governor who lost a bitter 2002 race to Tom Vilsack. Yet he would go on to become Vilsack's key ally in fighting against eminent domain reform. Incidentally, Gross owned three parcels of land that would have become waterfront property had the project proceeded as planned. But after the eminent domain reform was passed, the county scaled the project down to between 400 and 500 acres and moved it to an area where only 17 landowners—and probably no homes—will be affected.

There are other weaknesses in Iowa's reform: For instance, while the law requires that municipalities demonstrate that 75 percent of a designated redevelopment zone be proven "blighted" in order to condemn the entire area, that still means that many non-blighted properties can be condemned in the name of redevelopment.

Iowa's eminent domain reform is better than nothing. But it probably isn't the model to which the rest of the country should aspire. Nearby South Dakota has passed a reform that flatly prohibits the use of eminent domain to force any transfer of land from one private individual or entity to another. And in Florida, Gov. Jeb Bush signed legislation before leaving office that forces towns to wait 10 years before transferring land acquired by eminent domain to private developers. McCain deserves credit for bringing property rights to the presidential campaign. Perhaps if his campaign lasts long enough, he will have the chance to tout better reforms than Iowa's. ♦

Saudi Arabia's Koran Kops

The religious police run amok.

BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

All is not well with the long-standing Saudi-U.S. alliance. In Washington, faint murmurs of discontent may be heard regarding an infusion of $20 billion worth of new U.S. weaponry to the desert kingdom, birthplace of 15 of the 19 terrorist hijackers of 9/11. Many Americans resent the proposal to supply more arms to a country that, especially with respect to Iraq, has turned out to be a less-than-reliable ally. Remember: At least half the "foreign fighters" in that country come from the desert kingdom.

That's one reason for the prospective arms deal to raise eyebrows. But close observers of Saudi affairs as well as Saudi dissidents have another concern. They wonder: Are the weapons intended to defend against foreign aggression or to strengthen the monarchy against growing discontent among its own subjects?

Saudi politics are opaque, to say the least, but there are increasing signals of social upheaval. King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz has taken small steps toward reform but must contend with powerful opposition from the Wahhabi religious establishment. The most serious source of public discontent is the abuse of power by the religious militia or mutawiyin. In July, religious militia members were brought into Saudi courts for the first time, charged with arbitrarily killing people taken into custody for morals offenses (including possession of alcohol, and an unchaperoned meeting between a man and an unrelated woman).

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The misdeeds of the mutawiyin, officially styled the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, have become so resented that some members of the royal family, as well as lower government agencies, have promised reform. On August 22, the Saudi daily *al-Watan* (The Nation) announced that the Saudi Bureau of Investigation and Public Prosecution had turned over two members of the mutawiyin to a higher court for trial in the May 2007 death of Salman Al-Huraiwisi. The victim had been swarmed by 18 mutawiyin in his family home on suspicion of keeping liquor, and died at their hands. But the mutawiyin are pushing back. "Reforms" promised for the end of Ramadan, in mid-October of this year, include recruiting better-qualified staff and involving young people in mutawiyin activities.

Promises to involve the young in the religious militia are hardly reassuring. *Al-Madina* newspaper reported on August 22 that King Abdul Aziz University had introduced a dress code banning males who grow their hair long or dress "inappropriately," under threat of cancellation of their monthly stipends or exclusion from class. And on August 21, the governor of Mecca region, Prince Khalid al-Faisal, issued an alarming decree. Many Saudis had hoped he might liberalize the western Hejaz region (which includes the two main holy sites of Islam and has always resented the Wahhabis). Instead, he commanded the administrative personnel in the cities of Jeddah, Mecca, and Taif to adopt guidelines from the religious

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militia that called for prohibiting tight clothing, long hair on men, and jewelry.

The mutawiyin also called for preventing coffee shops from serving customers outdoors (where unaccompanied men and women might see each other or meet), and further demanded that Saudi Arabia bar the import of Western clothing and jewelry entirely. The mutawiyin suggested barring young people from the streets at night unless they are involved in specific errands.

The only function of the mutawiyin is to enforce the strict fundamentalist code of Wahhabism. Militia members patrol the shrine of Muhammad in Medina to assure that traditional Muslims do not "worship" Muhammad by praying directly to or touching the Prophet's tomb. They also walk the streets of the ancient city looking for anybody diverging from Wahhabi doctrine, including Shia pilgrims to Mecca and Medina.

On August 10, according to Reuters, a group of eight Iraqi Shia men aged 16 to 26, holding American and British citizenship, accused the mutawiyin of assaulting them in Mecca a week before. The eight Shias claimed they had been detained overnight and beaten by the religious militia for praying in the Shia manner, which differs slightly from the Sunni prayer ritual. A member of the Iraqi parliament said that two of the men were sons of Iraqi political figures. One of the pilgrims, Amir Taki, 24, declared, "We were handcuffed and savagely beaten with chairs, bats, sticks, shoes and police radio communication devices." They claimed to have been denied water, food, medicine, and toilet facilities, and to have been subjected to threats of murder. They escaped because one used a hidden cellphone to contact U.S. and British diplomats.

My colleague and coauthor Irfan al-Alawi (see our "Crisis of the Wahhabi Regime," in this magazine's issue of July 16, 2007), a British Sunni Muslim, had a similar experience to that of the Iraqi Shia pilgrims, on August 12. He writes, "I went to the prophet's Mosque to read my prayers. I moved close to the sacred chamber where the prophet is buried, which is made of a green coloured metal grill and has a wooden wall surrounding it. The mutawiyin and police sit behind the wooden wall and stop people from looking inside, touching the grill for blessings and praying towards it.

"As I took out a book consisting of salutations for the Prophet, one of the mutawiyin had left to change duty. I was reading the salutations facing the sacred chamber when a police officer told me to move away. The mutawwa who had left to change his shift told me not to face the sacred chamber. I made a gesture indicating I needed only two more minutes to finish praying, but the mutawwa insisted that I leave the area immediately. I continued reading from my book while sitting for approximately five more minutes, and then got up to leave. As I walked around the sacred chamber towards

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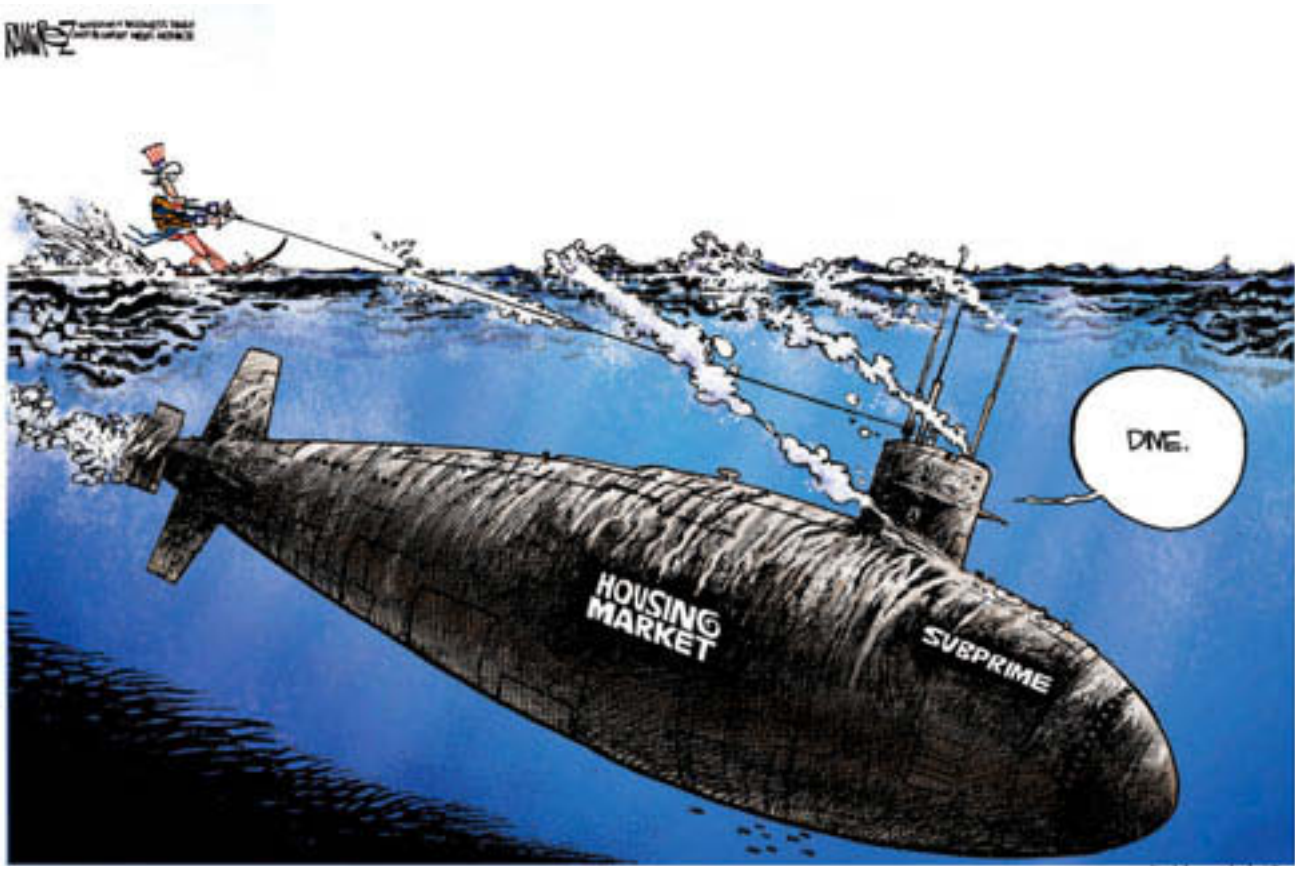
the exit, another mutawwa grabbed me at the indication of the first one, and led me towards the first. The first asked me for my card, to which I replied, 'Which card?' in English. He repeated, 'Card, card.' A well-dressed old Saudi man told the mutawwa to leave me alone, to which the mutawwa replied, 'Mind your own business and don't interfere.' He then asked me my nationality and when I replied that I was British he smirked.

"We then went to the head office of the mutawiyin. The one who arrested me reported the incident and told his senior that I ignored his instructions three times against praying facing the sacred chamber. I waited for ten minutes before a Pakistani dressed in the blue uniform of the Saudi bin Laden company came into the office and sat down next to me. He asked me in Urdu why I was there, and I repeated the incident, to which he replied, 'Why were you facing the sacred chamber?' He then asked me which book I was reading. He looked through it and then asked me whether I was a Shia to which I replied that I was not, but that I was a mainstream Sunni. He then said that the book I was reading was written by a Shia, which happens to be untrue.

"I asked him to ask the senior mutawwa whether I could leave as I needed to be at the airport at 10:30 A.M. The mutawwa refused and said since I had broken their rules and regulations I had to wait for another mutawwa by the name of Sheikh Ibrahim to come and speak to me. The senior mutawwa took out a large book. [Before allowing me to leave] he asked me for my name and my father's name, wrote down an account of the incident, and took my thumb print." (Such prints are typically substituted for signatures in Saudi Arabia because so many people, even members of the royal family, are illiterate.)

Al-Alawi's experience—being detained by the Saudi religious militia for facing the wrong direction while praying, not for any violation of civil or criminal law—is sadly typical of the abuses daily meted out to Saudi citizens. Meanwhile, the Saudi media are now filled with continuous complaints about the allegedly humiliating difficulties encountered by the kingdom's subjects in getting student visas to the United States.

All these problems—meddling in Iraq, abuses by the mutawiyin, suspicion about issuing visas to Saudis in the aftermath of the atrocities of September 11, 2001—have a root cause: state-sponsored Wahhabism. There is only one way for Saudi Arabia to change for the better: disestablishment of Wahhabism as the state religion, abolition of its doctrinal monopoly, and allowing religious pluralism such as exists, at least on paper, in many Muslim countries. If King Abdullah can accomplish this goal, all the better; but until it takes place, the Saudi crack-up may be long and even bloody. ♦



MICHAEL RAMIREZ

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An Unsurpassed Scholar

Muhsin S. Mahdi, 1926-2007.

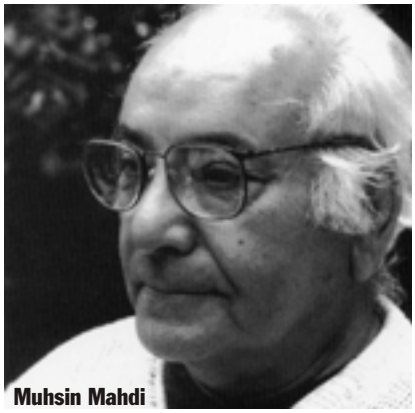
BY STEVEN J. LENZNER

Muhsin Mahdi, the world's foremost scholar of medieval Arabic and Islamic political philosophy, died last month at the age of 81. Not a single national publication has seen fit to print an obituary of Mahdi. This failure to do justice to a rare scholar, teacher, and human being underscores how little attention is being paid to something we are in dire need of today: the liberalizing and humanizing strands within the Islamic tradition, the topic to which Mahdi devoted his scholarly career.

Mahdi was born and reared in Iraq. After a sterling undergraduate career at the American University in Beirut, he was awarded a scholarship to study economics at the University of Chicago. Under the influence of gifted teachers like Nadia Abbott and Leo Strauss, he turned to philosophy and eventually to the study of Islamic political philosophy. He entered the Committee on Social Thought and earned his doctorate in 1954. His masterful dissertation was published in 1957 as *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History: A Study in the Philosophical Foundation of the Science of Culture.*

Mahdi's academic career was spent at Chicago (1957-69) and at Harvard (1969-96), where he held the James Richard Jewett Professorship in Arabic. He was an enormously influential teacher, and one who inspired great loyalty from his students. Some of us who took only a single course from Mahdi—typically, at Harvard, his survey of medieval political philosophy—found our lives markedly touched by his influence. (For a sense of Mahdi's teaching, see the impressive 1992 festschrift, *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy*, edited by one of his closest students, Charles Butterworth.)

Insofar as I can discern, the key to the almost universal respect in which Mahdi was held by his colleagues—for brilliance and deep learning, even when supplemented by considerable personal charm, are insufficient as an explanation—was his remarkable archival and philological work. Among other things, his rediscovery of many of Alfarabi's works (and his editing and translating of critical editions) rescued a thinker whom Mahdi, following a path laid down by Leo Strauss, showed to rank among both the great philosophers and the great authors.



Muhsin Mahdi

Mahdi's most celebrated achievement was the outcome of almost superhuman scholarly labor: a critical edition of the single greatest work of Arabic literature, *The Thousand and One Nights*. Husain Haddawy, who translated the edition into English, described Mahdi's achievement thus:

> After years of sifting, analyzing, and collating virtually all available texts, Muhsin Mahdi has published the definitive edition of the fourteenth-century Syrian manuscript in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* (*Alf Layla wa Layla*, Leiden, 1984). Mahdi fills lacunae, emends corruptions, and elucidates obscurities. . . . What emerges is a coherent and precise work that, unlike other versions, is like a restored icon or musical score without the added layers of paint or distortions, hence, as close to the original as possible. Thus a long-standing grievance has been finally redressed, and redressed with a sense of poetic justice, not only because this edition redeems all others from a general curse, but also because it is the work of a man who is at once the product of East and West.

In his life and work, Muhsin Mahdi also transcended the idea of East and West. He was, as a mutual friend put it after his death, a liberal in the old-fashioned and elevated sense—a man with a true liberal education, deeply versed in, and shaped by, the world's great books. In no way did this show itself more clearly than in Mahdi's devotion to his teacher Leo Strauss. Mahdi's last book, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* (2001)—the fruit of a lifetime of study and unsurpassed on the subject—bears the dedication: "*For L.S.*—If we had to repay the debt of gratitude incurred by his kindness to us, not even the whole of time would suffice."

In the classroom, I remember Mahdi taking a seemingly dead and wooden work like Alfarabi's *Summary of Plato's "Laws"* and showing why, when read with care and imagination, it was anything but. That is a rare gift. But it was made possible by his having engaged Alfarabi's work in the spirit intended by the author—namely, with a view to the problem caused by the need for a serious politics to address the question of the divine without falling prey to the simple-minded and/or tyrannical impulses that frequently accompany some of the most typical answers to that question. That is to say, Mahdi counseled practical moderation while allowing one to appreciate theoretical greatness. Everyone who learned from him, or who will learn from his writings, owes him a debt of gratitude that cannot be repaid. ♦

Steven J. Lenzner is a research fellow in political philosophy at the Henry Salvatori Center of Claremont McKenna College.

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THE HORROR! THE HORROR!

The paranoid style of the American left

By Noemie Emery

The fascists are coming! Or rather, they're already here, installed in the White House, planning like mad to subvert the Constitution and extend their reign in perpetuity, having first suppressed and eviscerated all opposition and put all of their critics in jail. Thus goes the rant of America's increasingly unhinged left. *If only*, sigh many Bush partisans, wondering when this administration will get out of the fetal position and show some fighting spirit. To them, as to most reasonable observers, the White House shows the chronic fatigue of a two-term presidency reaching its final year. Nonetheless, paranoia about what Bush and Co. are up to preys on the minds of many progressives, who have progressed, in this case at least, beyond reason.

It Can Happen Here, says Joe Conason, in his book of the same name, and in fact it already has started: George W. Bush and his coterie are the very picture of the pious and scheming homegrown *fascisti* that Sinclair Lewis described in his 1935 novel *It Can't Happen Here*. Similarities abound. In Lewis's novel, "Buzz Windrip" (Bush), an illiterate dweeb with sleazy charm and low animal cunning, backed by Lee Sarason (Karl Rove), a smooth and duplicitous political mastermind, becomes president, cooks up a fake war to extend his own power, cows Congress, corrupts the courts, bankrupts the country, and all but destroys the free press. The core of his power is a sinister nexus of theocrats joined at the hip to corporate interests, and you can tell

Noemie Emery, a Weekly Standard *contributing editor, is author, most recently, of* Great Expectations: The Troubled Lives of Political Families.

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how evil they are by their proclaimed love of country, and their incessant talk about God. In their endeavors, they are backed by the Hearst newspaper empire (Fox News), the only one left after all other outlets have been shut down.

Fox News looms large in the liberal panic about creeping fascism—an immense smoke machine pumping poison gas into the atmosphere 24/7, against which there is neither escape nor defense. This theory of the pervasive malevolent power of Fox rests on a quip by anchor Brit Hume that the network played a decisive role in the 2002 midterms, which Conason seems to take seriously, and the scholarly output of two obscure professors arguing that Fox swung the presidential elections of 2000 and 2004 as well. "Citing what they call 'The Fox Effect,'" Conason informs us, "professors Stefano Della Vigna of the University of California at Berkeley and Ethan Kaplan of the University of Stockholm found that the network convinced 2 to 8 percent of its non-Republican viewing audience to 'shift its voting behavior toward the Republican party.'" If they say so. But there is no corresponding mention of the NBC-ABC-CBS-*Time-Newsweek-New York Times* "effect," and what its impact on voters might be.

In 4,600 overwrought words, Naomi Wolf explained to the readers of the 'Guardian' that there are ten steps to "Fascist America" and Bush is taking them all. He has created "a prison system outside the rule of law," to which public dissidents, including "clergy and journalists" will be sent "soon enough."

At the same time that Conason is looking back to a fictional past in America, Naomi Wolf—last heard from in 2000 advising Al Gore to dress in earth tones—is looking back to a real past in Europe, and seeing troubling parallels. In 4,600 overwrought words, she explained to the readers of the *Guardian* that there are ten steps to "Fascist America" and Bush is taking them all. He has whipped up a menace (the war on terror); created "a prison system outside the rule of law" (Guantánamo, to which public dissidents, including "clergy and journalists" will be sent "soon enough"); developed "a thug caste . . . groups of scary young men out to terrorize citizens" (young Republican staffers who supposedly "menaced poll workers" during the 2000 recount in Florida); set up an "internal surveillance system" (NSA scanning for phone calls to and from terrorists). An airtight case, this, and leading to just one conclusion: "Beneath our very noses, George Bush and his administration are using time-tested tactics to close down an open society. It is time for us to be willing to think the unthinkable . . . that it can happen here."

Well, this explains many things. It explains why poor Cindy Sheehan is now sitting in prison; why Bush critics like CIA retiree Valerie Plame have been ostracized by the corporate media and are wasting away in anonymity; why no critic of Bush can get a hearing, why no book complaining about him can ever get published, and why our multiplexes are filled with one pro-Bush propaganda movie after another, glorifying the Iraq war and rallying the nation behind its leader.

Meanwhile, back on planet Earth, Cindy Sheehan is running for Congress; Valerie Plame is rich and famous; the young Republican "thugs" made all of one appearance seven years ago—chanting "Let us in!" when Miami-Dade County vote counters planned to move to a small inner room with no observers present; and press censorship is now so far-reaching that you can't even expose a legal, effective, and top-secret plan to trace terrorists without getting a Pulitzer Prize. "What if the publisher of a major U.S. newspaper were charged with treason or espionage?" Wolf asks breathlessly. "What if he or she got 10 years in jail?" Well, journalists have been harassed, pressed for their sources, and threatened with prison, but not by George W. Bush and his people. Back in the real world, only one prominent journalist has been jailed by the federal government in recent memory, and that was Judith Miller, imprisoned for 80-plus days for contempt by prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald, the great hero of the anti-Bush forces for having indicted Vice President Cheney's chief of staff.

Such is life here in Fascist America. Of course, some think that the coup took place some time back, in the form of two, three, even four stolen elections over the span of six years. In 2000, they agree, the election was stolen by the Supreme Court, after Governor Jeb Bush and other Republicans in Florida had systematically disenfranchised liberal voters through misleading ballots, illegal purges, faulty machines, and long lines. After 2002, most had moved on to a different fixation: the touch-screen electronic voting machines that they thought had been secretly programmed to tip key elections to conservatives. "There is strong evidence that Kerry won the popular vote [in the 2004 election]," Robert F. Kennedy Jr. told the *Progressive* before the 2006 midterms. "There were easily three million votes that were shifted. . . . There

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were 80,000 Democratic voters in twelve western Ohio rural counties who cast a vote for Kerry and had their votes shifted. . . . In six other counties there were tens of thousands of Kerry voters who had their votes shifted to Bush."

Exit polls and predictions were taken as proof that the vote count was tampered with. "On Wall Street, and in betting parlors nationwide, Kerry was the gamblers' pick," wrote Mark Crispin Miller, a professor of media studies at New York University. "There was the unprecedented gap between the exit polls and the official tally. . . . No one would discuss the soundest explanation of the mystery, clearly posed by Steve Freeman, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania: the exit polls were accurate, and the official numbers fraudulent. . . . Votes for Bush were invented, Democratic votes were prevented or discarded, or converted into still more votes for Bush." Miller is not a figure of the academic fringe; he has written frequently over the years—albeit not on his voting-machine theories—for such publications as the *New York Times*, *Slate*, and the *New Republic*.

In a long article in *Rolling Stone* in 2006, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. implied that the surprise 2002 wins in Georgia of Saxby Chambliss and gubernatorial candidate Sonny Perdue were due to the installation of touch-screen machines in the state that spring and summer, and especially to a visit in July 2002 by a president of the voting machine company, who oversaw the planting in many machines of what was described as a mystery software update, or patch. "It was an unauthorized patch, and they were trying to keep it secret," a former employee had told Kennedy. "There could be a hidden program on a memory card that adjusts everything to the preferred election results," the employee added. "Your program says, 'I want my candidate to stay ahead by three or four percent or whatever.' Those programs can include a built-in delete that erases itself after it's done." When election experts denied this was possible, the conspiracy theorists attacked them; and when the press refused to report on their theories, they complained it was in on the plot. Democrats who refused to complain were denounced as collaborators in the conservatives' fascist plot. As Mark Crispin Miller told Bob Cesca of the *Huffington Post*, the press and the Democrats were in a state of denial, unable to accept or to deal with reality. They refused to acknowledge that "the United States is clearly not a democratic country, or that the Bush administration are dangerous extremists, intent on building a one-party theocratic state."

Students of election procedures readily acknowledge that touch-screen machines have their problems, that it would be nice to have a paper-trail back-up. But all voting systems have their technical drawbacks, all have lost votes, all have had breakdowns and failures. Investigations undertaken by the Democratic National Committee and the state's leading papers—the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, the Cincinnati *Enquirer*, and the *Columbus Dispatch*—found Kennedy's conspiracy-mongering baseless, noting that elections in Ohio (as most everywhere) are run on a bipartisan basis, that the voting machines in inner-city precincts were put there by Democrats, that the purges of voter rolls undertaken by Republican secretary of state Kenneth Blackwell were mandated by law to weed out nonvoters, and that Ohio's rate for counting provisional ballots was the third highest in the United States.

Democratic pollster Mark Blumenthal, at his Mystery Pollster blog, unraveled the myth of the exit polls that Kennedy described as "exquisitely accurate." To the contrary, he reported, they were error-prone, unreliable, and had a record in the past four presidential elections of tipping heavily to the Democrats' side: in 1988, they exaggerated the Democrats' vote by 2.2 points; in 1992 by 5.0 points, by 2.2 points again four years later, and in 2000 by 1.8. In 2004, the spread was 6.5 points, barely higher than it was in 1992, the difference being that the candidate projected as being the winner then was the one who in the end won. Blumenthal noted that "Senior election officials from the Carter Center have repeatedly advised against the use of exit polls in election monitoring in Central American countries, calling them 'risky,' 'unreliable,' and 'misleading'" and that an election project funded by the U.N. and the U.S. Agency for International Development had concluded, "The majority of exit polls carried out in European countries over the past years have been failures. . . . One might think there is no reason why voters in stable democracies should conceal or lie about how they have voted . . . but they do." Joe Andrews, a chairman of the Democratic National Committee in the late 1990s, has repeatedly noted that touch-screen machines really help Democrats, by making voting easier for their constituent groups, including disabled and elderly voters.

Nonetheless, in the months leading up to the 2006 midterms, rumors that the election was about to be stolen attained fever pitch. Rosie O'Donnell accused the Diebold company, the leading manufacturer of voting machines, of cheating. HBO showcased *Hacking Democracy*, an ominous documentary warning that free elections were a thing of the past. Then came the election itself—and the Democrats won. They won 30 House seats, and took back the House; they won six Senate seats, and took back the Senate; out of six very close calls in the Senate, they won five.

How could any self-respecting Fascist have allowed this to happen? The answer seemed to be that the Republicans had cheated, but incompetently: They cut the Democrats' true totals almost in half, which wasn't enough.

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"The Democrats may well have picked up over 50 House seats (as opposed to 29) and one or more [additional] Senate seats," Mark Crispin Miller explained, insisting that the proof lay in the exit polls, which said one thing on Election Day and another on the day after. Republicans had put the fix in early, before the effect of late-breaking stories like the Mark Foley scandal had kicked in. "As the e-voting machinery was now often closely monitored . . . the party's gremlins would have fixed the codes as early as they could so as to hide their actions. . . . Thus did they lock themselves into a lead that, while it may well have seemed sufficient . . . was finally not enough to do the trick." Q.E.D. For weeks and months before the 2006 midterms, Miller had warned that if they lost, Republicans would raise fraud charges hoping to overturn the results, "much as they did after the rape of Florida in 2000." When instead they conceded quickly and graciously, Miller took this as even more proof of their infamy. "It is far likelier that [they] folded to protect themselves, as any real investigation of the civic crime wave in 2006 would probably land them, or their minions, in the slammer."

Ask those who see plots what they think they are fighting, and it will not be anything small. They see themselves locked in an end-of-times struggle, defending the full range of Enlightenment values against a rogue clique made up of backward fanatics, bent upon snuffing them out. And who are these dangerous extremists? For a deep cultural explanation, let us turn to the prolific author and Washington think-tanker Michael Lind, whose neglected 2004 classic, *Made in Texas: George W. Bush and the Southern Takeover of American Politics*, uncovered the Texan conspiracy to bring back the Confederacy, complete with slave labor. The president, you see, was "born in New Haven, Connecticut, but reared in the reactionary culture of Anglo-Southern West Texas," and as a result is heir not to the parties of Lincoln or of either Roosevelt, but to the segregationists of the Jim Crow and the Ku Klux Klan eras, and longing to turn the clock back to their day.

HBO showcased 'Hacking Democracy,' an ominous documentary warning that free elections were a thing of the past. Then came the election itself—and the Democrats won. How could any self-respecting Fascist have allowed this to happen?

Lind has nothing to say about Diebold or touch screens, but he does agree that the 2000 election was stolen, making the startling claim that Al Gore's razor-thin popular vote margin of roughly 537,000 (out of 100 million votes cast) was the equivalent of Lyndon Johnson's 1964 rout of Barry Goldwater, when he won by a popular vote margin of about 16 million, while carrying all but six states. "The votes for Al Gore and Ralph Nader combined created the largest popular-vote landslide for the center-left since 1964," Lind tells us. It "was as though Lyndon Johnson had trounced Barry Goldwater—who had nonetheless gone on to win the presidency, as result of the archaic electoral college." In fact, the combined Gore-Nader edge over Bush in the 2000 election (about three million votes) was no more a "landslide" than Bush's 2004 win over John Kerry. And the thin edge of four votes in the Electoral College accurately reflected the tie in the country, as Johnson's 1964 edge of almost 400 reflected the size and the breadth of his sweep. (For that matter, if one really wants to play this game, how about the 14-million-vote Bush-Perot wipeout of the usurper Bill Clinton in 1992?)

Lind's case against Bush as a white supremacist and oppressive reactionary is as follows: (1) His ranch house in Crawford and his father's presidential library in nearby College Station are located in the historic Texan lynching "belt"; (2) the town of Waco, 18 miles from Crawford, is home to the Texas Rangers' Hall of Fame, whose members "many Mexican-Texans and Mexicans . . . consider to be racist thugs and murderers"; (3) "Six Confederate generals were Waco residents, and the CSA raised seventeen companies from Waco, and surrounding towns like Crawford"; (4) in the 1870s, a prominent Texas politician named Richard Coke imposed strict Jim Crow laws as governor and, as a congressman, voted against the Force Bill, a federal measure to extend the vote to ex-slaves; (5) in 1916, a horrendous race crime was committed in Waco; (6) in the 1920s, Waco was a noted Ku Klux Klan stronghold; (7) in the 1930s, a man named J. Evetts Haley, "one typical example of the political culture that produced

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the two Bushes," belonged to a group of Democrats who opposed Franklin D. Roosevelt. In 1956, Haley ran for governor on a segregationist platform. And in 1964 he opposed the Civil Rights Act and wrote "a conspiracy-theory tract" that attacked LBJ for his "statement 'that man's best hope lies in the realm of reason.'"

Against this indictment of Bush (and his father), Lind has kind things to say of a few other Texans, among them Lyndon B. Johnson (who appears here as a gentle and modest transplanted Midwesterner) and the notorious moonbat H. Ross Perot. Johnson, too, is a creature of the land he grew up on, in his case the Hill Country, a small chunk of Eden inside the Hell that is Texas, "an island of intellect." As Lind puts it, "Bush is a product of the Deep South traditions of the cotton plantation country . . . while Lyndon Johnson grew up in a region shaped by German-American Unionism, liberalism, and anti-slavery sentiment," in which the "German Texans did not despise leisure or learning. Their beer gardens rang with the melodies of their singing-clubs," and they replaced the other Texans' favorite pastime of lynching with reading and writing and song. If this sounds unlike the LBJ of history—rather more like his antithesis, Eugene McCarthy—rest assured that it gets even better. Another hero of reason is H. Ross Perot. "To Perot, the high-tech populist, the Bushes were upper-class parasites enriching themselves through the exploitation of riches that should have benefited all Texans. . . . Perot hated the Bushes and the Bakers in the way that Juan Perón, another modernizing tribune of the masses . . . once hated the Anglophile oligarchs of the Buenos Aires Jockey Club." This explains everything: LBJ as a scholarly German-American, Juan Perón as a model reformer, and George Bush the elder as a would-be Confederate general. If you buy Perot (and Perón) as democratic reformers, you will surely buy George W. Bush as an arch-segregationist, trying to bring back the Glorious Cause.

One who does buy it is Albert Gore Jr., the vice president turned ecology prophet, who has written a book, *The Assault on Reason*, which is in essence an assault on Bush. The most prominent figure to buy into the assertion that modern conservatism is a force more sinister than any before seen in this country, Gore has spent much of the last four years railing away at the president for his "incuriosity about new information," his "refusal to even consider complexity," his scorn for all kinds of dissenting opinions, his use of emotion to rouse fear in people, and his "disdain for facts." The problem for Gore is that increasing numbers of people—including a few from the Temple of Science—are saying much the same things about him. Climate change has emerged as a crusading faith in itself, with a high fervor quotient and no room for questions, proving that in order to be a religious fanatic, you don't need a religion per se. As Michael Barone notes, Gore has stolen the tropes of religion: "We Americans have sinned, and we will be punished. . . . We have been selfish . . . we must do penance by sacrificing some of our comforts (though not the gigantic houses and private jet travel of Al Gore or John Edwards)." Earlier this year the Gaia Napa Valley Hotel (where else?) replaced its stores of Gideon Bibles with copies of *An Inconvenient Truth*, by Al Gore.

How true is this truth Gore is spreading? Gore claims that there is a consensus, which just isn't true. "There is unanimity that the planet has warmed by about 1 degree over the last century. Just about everyone agrees that the growth of greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels cannot continue forever," says Steve Hayward, of the American Enterprise Institute. "That's where the agreement ends." This hasn't stopped Gore and his fans from comparing his critics to Hitler or to Holocaust deniers, a strange simile as denying something that is known to have happened is different by the standards of any rational person from wondering whether something may occur in the future.

This isn't the only charge of denial of reason that critics have brought against Gore. A British expert on climate change complained to the BBC of "politicians . . . confusing the language of

Here is what the Party of Reason believes: A country in which dissent is a flourishing industry is on the brink of a great fascist crackdown, as you can tell by all the books written attacking the president, the plays put on that call him an idiot, and the movies that call for his death.

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fear, terror and disaster with the observable physical reality of climate change, actively ignoring the careful hedging which surrounds science's predictions," and said that "to state that climate change will be 'catastrophic' hides a cascade of value-laden assumptions." Even the *New York Times* reported that some scientists sympathetic to Gore were nonetheless "alarmed . . . at what they call his alarmism," not to mention his "exaggerated and erroneous" arguments, namely, his depiction of "a future in which temperatures soar, ice sheets melt, seas rise, hurricanes batter the coasts and people die en masse."

Even when he was a mere politician, rational discourse was hardly Gore's forte. As a candidate, he was known for the unexplained and radical U-turns he would make in long-standing positions, and for the savagery with which he attacked his opponents. In 2002, he ignored the candidates he was supposed to campaign for as he railed about his close loss in 2000, and urged voters to flock to the polls to punish Republicans and avenge his great wrong. In 2004, it had gotten no better. "In an angry, sweaty shout, sounding like the second coming of Huey Long, Gore drew an extended comparison between the post-Watergate election of 1976, the year of his first election to Congress, and the post-Iraq election of 2004," wrote Chris Suellentrop, describing how Gore relived not only his own loss in 2000 but also his father's long ago loss in the Senate, in a speech that was less a rational argument than a howl of unrelieved rage.

God sometimes seems to be toying with the Goracle, scheduling frigid weather and ice storms on the dates of his speeches about global warming, but his fans have an answer for that: all weather changes, if they are dire, come from global warming. Here are some other choice fancies that the Party of Reason believes:

¶ Global warning causes both hot and cold weather, just as elections are stolen when the Democrats lose them, but are stolen too when they win.

¶ A country in which dissent is a flourishing industry is on the brink of a great fascist crackdown, as you can tell by all the books written attacking the president, the plays put on that call him an idiot, and the movies that call for his death.

¶ When exit polls indicate a different result from the actual vote count, the polls are correct and the vote count is fraudulent, a fact covered up by journalists who are (a) Democrats by something close to a nine-to-one ratio; and (b) dying to uncover a huge government scandal, so that they too can be famous like Woodward and Bernstein, make millions of dollars, and be played in the movies by Hollywood stars.

¶ That the Presidents Bush, from Yale and a long line of Yankees, who made the careers of the first black secretaries of state ever named in this country, are secretly longing to bring back the South of 1859.

¶ And, that the Republican party, whose frontrunners are a once-divorced actor (just like Ronald Reagan), a Mormon from Massachusetts by way of Michigan, and a thrice-married Italian Catholic from the streets of Brooklyn, is a shrunken husk of a regional faction, punitive, narrow, and wholly obsessed with extreme social mores, relying on extralegal repression to perpetuate itself in power. To the more intense members of the reality faction, all of this makes perfect sense.

Ah, reason! How sweet it is, and to what lengths it can lead you, when you think that you have a monopoly on it. Political parties are coalitions of interests, fighting it out in a series of struggles, in which no side has a patent on wisdom and virtue, and no wins are ever complete. People who understand this maintain their own balance and bearings, but those who insist they are fighting for reason lose what remains of their own.

Over and over, they do what they claim their opponents are doing, want to do, or have done: make vast leaps of faith on almost no evidence, get carried away on large waves of emotion, build towering edifices on small collections of factoids, omit, deny, or denounce all contrary evidence, build fantastical schemes which they project on the enemy, put two and two together and get 384. People are entitled to say what they want, but it takes something other than reason to look at raging debates and discern in them fascistic oppression, to look at large Republican losses (wholly in line with a sixth-year election) and see massive fraud on the part of the losers, to look at today's South and see John Calhoun's, to draft both the Bushes (and the entire Republican party) into the Confederate Army, 150 years after the fact. Facts on the ground have no effect on their fantasies, which exist in a realm of their own.

Let's give the last words to Mark Crispin Miller, as he told the blog *Buzzflash* in February 2006: "That sort of warped perception comes from extreme paranoid projectivity: the tendency to rail at others for traits or longings that one hates and fears inside oneself. . . . We're dealing with a movement that is anti-rational. It's faith-based . . . it's a movement that believes what it believes, and it believes what it believes is right. . . . It believes what it wants to believe. If it hears contrary evidence, it comes up with evidence of its own. . . . This is not a movement that the rational can ever shame into surrendering by merely demonstrating its illogic to its followers. . . . Paranoia . . . is based on fear, and therefore on a kind of 'logic' that's impervious to evidence and quite incapable of learning from experience. . . . Paranoia is an atavism, deep within us all."

Right you are. ♦

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Operation Phantom Strike

How the U.S. Military Is Demolishing Al Qaeda in Iraq

After four long years, the coalition has finally grasped the keys to victory. Al Qaeda has begun to lose the staging areas it needs for attacks in Baghdad. Just staying alive and avoiding capture is becoming a full-time occupation for the insurgents.

By Mario Loyola

Captured with night-vision technology, one of many helicopters in an "air assault" squadron of the 3rd Infantry Division takes part in the first attack of Operation Marne Huskey, August 15.

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Falluja, Iraq

On August 15, several hours after night fell over Baghdad, an air assault squadron of the 3rd Infantry Division launched the first attack of Operation Marne Husky. A dozen darkened transport and attack helicopters took off and headed south along the Tigris River, carrying a full company of infantry—about 120 young riflemen with night goggles and weapons loaded. Their objective was a hamlet several dozen miles away. At about 11 P.M., the force landed and rapidly surrounded several small structures. The occupants were taken by surprise. Five suspected insurgents were captured. By 4 A.M., the entire team was airborne again.

Every night since then similar scenes have unfolded at dozens of locations in and around Baghdad—all part of a larger operation named Phantom Strike. The attacks involve units of all sizes and configurations, coming in by air and land. In some cases, the units get out quickly. In others, they pitch tents for an extended stay. The idea is to keep the enemy—al Qaeda and its affiliates—on the defense and constantly guessing, thereby turning formerly "safe" insurgent areas into areas of prohibitive risk for them.

Time and space

The impetus for Phantom Strike was, in a way, born in Washington, where Congress created a series of benchmarks for progress in Iraq by mid-September, at which point an "interim report" is required from Gen. David Petraeus, the U.S. commander. The legislation inadvertently (perhaps "negligently" is a better word) created a "Tet" opportunity for al Qaeda here. If it can dominate headlines with spectacular mass-casualty suicide attacks

Mario Loyola, a fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, is embedded with the Marine Expeditionary Force in western Iraq.

US ARMY PHOTO

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in the days and weeks leading up to the report, the political climate in Washington might turn irretrievably against the military effort, thereby snatching a victory for the terrorists that they have failed to win on the ground. (Just as the Viet Cong's Tet offensive in 1968, while a military debacle for them, convinced U.S. media and political elites that that war was lost.) With this in mind, operational planners earlier this year began laying out a strategy to disrupt al Qaeda's ability to carry out the expected attacks.

Learning from past mistakes, commanders of the "surge" forces now take territory only if they can hold it. But for certain elements of Phantom Strike, they are making an exception to that rule. Divisional commands across Iraq have been instructed to cash in their accumulated intel and attack insurgents where they are most likely to be hiding—whether it makes sense to hold the territory or not. In planning rooms across the central third of Iraq, commanders looked at their target wish-lists—places where they had taken fire in the past, or tracked possible insurgents, or gotten credible tips from the population—and chose the most enticing ones.

The Joint Campaign Plan, a document that operationalizes the surge in accordance with Petraeus's counterinsurgency strategy, calls for coalition forces to give the government of Iraq "the time and space that it needs to succeed," according to military officers. The practical emphasis has been on "space." By pushing coalition forces out from their bases and into neighborhoods across Baghdad and other major urban centers in Iraq, commanders have sought to establish "area security" through "clear, control, and retain" operations. Key to retaining these areas is the participation of Iraqi Security Forces and other nonmilitary Iraqi government support.

The success enjoyed in places like Anbar province has come because security forces convinced people that they were there to stay. Those populations have shown their appreciation by joining the fight against al Qaeda in their neighborhoods, joining the police, and establishing neighborhood watch systems. Purely disruptive raids in which neither control nor retention is sought have thus fallen somewhat into disfavor.

But there is one good reason not to abandon them altogether. Disruption is a way to seize and maintain the initiative. Disruptive attacks keep the enemy off-balance, guessing as to your next move. That makes him concentrate on defense, and put off his own attacks. It's like a boxer keeping his opponent on the ropes with a flurry of jabs until the right moment for a knock-out blow.

Operation Marne Husky is just such a disruptive operation. Most of General Rick Lynch's 3rd Infantry forces are committed to massive "clear control and retain" (CCR) operations in his area. He was therefore somewhat short of troops to contribute to Phantom Strike activities. But he wasn't short on targets. His operations have produced a steady stream of al Qaeda and other insurgents fleeing further south for safety, mostly to an area on the Tigris known as the Samarrah jungle. Flushed from their safe havens, and tracked by intel, the insurgents were now vulnerable—in some cases, sitting ducks. Once the Phantom Strike guidance gave Lynch the order to attack, all he needed was a little ingenuity to come up with the right assets.

The 3rd Infantry Division headquarters has a combat air brigade with more than a hundred helicopters. Marshalling other support services, and mustering a company of crack infantry freed up by the dramatically reduced tempo of operations in Anbar, Lynch put together an ad hoc unit for targeted strike operations, rather like a special forces contingent. In the first week of operations, this small force killed seven fighters and detained 64 suspects including 14 high-value targets, clearing nearly 120 structures in the process.

Such results are an early return on investment for the doctrines developed by Petraeus. The Counterinsurgency Field Manual, formulated under his command and released last December, chews through a lot of theory to arrive at one basic practical tenet: "Intelligence drives operations." The counterinsurgency manual specifies that being able to distinguish between insurgents and civilians is the key to victory.

The only way to do that is to provide protection for the population, enfranchise them, and enlist their help in identifying the insurgents. This creates a virtuous circle—security operations produce good intel which produces

Commanders of the surge forces now take territory only if they can hold it. But for certain elements of Phantom Strike, they are making an exception to that rule. Divisional commands have been instructed to cash in their accumulated intel and attack insurgents where they are most likely to be hiding—whether it makes sense to hold the territory or not.

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better security operations and in turn better intel. The CCR operations in and around Baghdad have produced a trove of actionable intelligence on al Qaeda—its movements, its senior leaders, and the sources and locations of its weapons, explosives, and bomb-making equipment. Phantom Strike has capitalized on that intel, further reducing al Qaeda's capacity to attack, which has improved security and increases the population's confidence in the Coalition and in the Iraqi Security Forces.

Of course, al Qaeda has not taken all of this lying down. All the good news coming out of Iraq recently is even more depressing for al Qaeda than it is for Harry Reid, if that is possible, and al Qaeda could smell that something like Phantom Strike might be coming. It had to pull off a spectacular attack—and it did. On August 14, four near-simultaneous car bombs destroyed whole rows of mud-brick houses in a pair of small farming villages in Yazidi, killing on the order of 400 Iraqis, and wounding many more—a horrifying toll even for today's Iraq.

But the site of the terror attack—in the far northwest of Iraq, 75 miles west of Mosul beyond the upper Tigris—was very interesting.

Because Iraq's populated areas hug the Tigris, the Euphrates, and Diyala rivers, the human geography of the country lies along five corridors all connected to a central hub, Baghdad.

Lay of the land

To understand why, it is necessary to know something of the human geography of Iraq. Baghdad sits at the confluence of the Tigris River and its main tributary, the Diyala; these both flow from the north. The Euphrates River travels across Iraq from west to east, curving sharply south in the southwest suburbs of Baghdad. From there, the Euphrates and the Tigris converge gently, finally issuing, far to the south, into the Persian Gulf. Because Iraq's populated areas hug its great rivers, the human geography of the country lies along five corridors all connected to a central hub—Baghdad.

Outside those fertile corridors lies a scorching, lifeless desert—in many places no further than three miles from the nearest river. Because the desert has no water, it favors the army that can most easily maneuver over long distances with its own water. The Americans are thus masters of the desert in Iraq.

The insurgents, by contrast, don't do so well there. Even when they disguise themselves as Bedouins, their patterns of congregation and movement are easily detected by the scores of unmanned aerial vehicles constantly on the prowl overhead. And they can't move around readily, because the desert is largely impassable and in any case totally exposed, its few roads easily monitored. This means both the insurgency and the counterinsurgency center on Iraq's five river corridors.

Of these, the one where al Qaeda has suffered its clearest and most humiliating defeat is along the western Euphrates—the corridor stretching from Baghdad to Falluja, Ramadi, Haditha, and on to Al Qaim near the Syrian border. Not too long ago the heart of the Sunni insurgency, the entire corridor has fallen to coalition forces. Insurgents are finding that they can't get past the outer checkpoints far enough to approach any of the main cities, and even crossing from one side of the Euphrates to the other has become extremely difficult. Indeed the situation in Anbar has advanced to the point where the Marine Expeditionary Force has hit all of its major "intel targets" and had virtually none to nominate for the Phantom Strike campaign.

Moving counterclockwise, the corridors formed by the southern Euphrates and Tigris rivers, and the irrigated land between them, are mainly Iraq's Shiite heart-

WEEKLY STANDARD MAPS BY PHILIP CHALK

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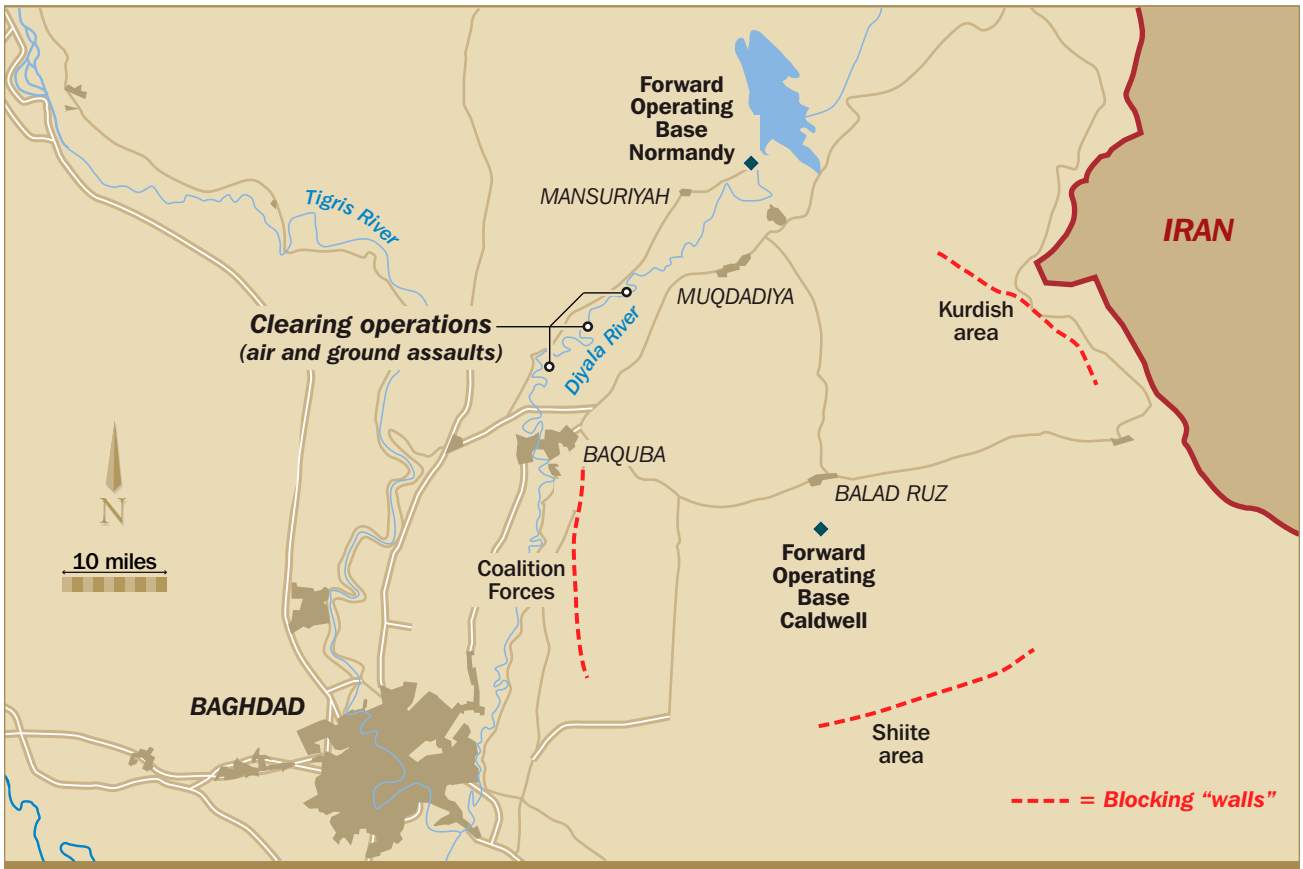

Operation Lightning Hammer began in mid-August with the goal of clearing insurgents from the Diyala River valley, one of their last "safe" areas. The prospects for these fighters are not good. The north and south end of the valleys are blocked, as is the valley's western border. The eastern escape from the valley is open for them, but that leads them into areas controlled by the Kurds and the Shiites.

land. But this twin corridor is dominated at its northern end by a belt of Sunni settlements, running along the outer perimeter of southern Baghdad. Saddam Hussein contrived this as a defense-in-depth of his precious capital. In this Baghdad belt, Lynch's division has been conducting a series of enormous CCR operations. Insurgents are fleeing south, but will soon start running into the Shiite wall, where (after years—indeed decades—of abusing the Shiites) they are likely to suffer a fate far worse than getting captured by coalition forces.

The next river corridor to the north is the Diyala valley, which leads from Baghdad to Baquba, Muqtadiya, and Mansuriyah, finally hitting the Kurdish region where the terrain becomes mountainous. Starting in mid-June with Operation Arrowhead Ripper, which focused on Baquba, this area has seen the heaviest fighting in Iraq since the start of the surge last February. It is also the site of the most complex and interesting of the Phantom Strike operations—Lightning Hammer—which focuses on the upper Diyala River valley from Baquba to the Kurdish region.

These four corridors, which only a year ago were wide open to the insurgents, have become increasingly nettlesome and dangerous for them since the start of the surge. The large areas shown on intel maps as "safe" for the insurgents only last year have been whittled down to small pockets here and there. Al Qaeda and its affiliates are increasingly desperate for safe havens from which to operate and lines of communication they can rely on.

Increasingly the insurgents' only option is the fifth corridor, the northern Tigris River valley stretching from Baghdad to Samarrah, Tikrit, and Mosul in the far north. This is why the location of al Qaeda's August 16 attack, 75 miles west of Mosul, was so telling. The car-bombs were likely assembled near Mosul because of the increased risk of trying to assemble them anywhere else in Iraq. And they were "delivered" locally because al Qaeda probably decided that the long journey down the Tikrit-Samarrah-Baghdad highway was too dangerous.

Al Qaeda understands how to manipulate western media well enough to know that they don't always need to attack in Baghdad. Indeed, the bombing dominated

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the headlines in the United States in the dramatic opening days of Operation Phantom Strike. But because of *where* it occurred, it told the coalition's planners that they have been effective, too.

Hammer and anvil

No current fighting shows the ingenuity of U.S. planners better than the Lightning Hammer operations in the Diyala River valley. The focus of Lightning Hammer at the moment is an elegant and dramatic attack on the suspected havens of the al Qaeda elements that were forced north out of Baquba earlier this summer.

The attack unfolded in two phases, the first of which was the rapid concentration of forces at several different points along the upper Diyala River valley. Two air assault squadrons, one from the the 25th Infantry Division out of Kirkuk, and another of the 82nd Airborne out of Tikrit, took off for the western side of the valley. Consisting of several dozen helicopters and some 240 soldiers, the two squadrons converged on five locations among the maze of canals and broken farmland that runs along the western edge of the valley. Their purpose was to establish a screen to block the most likely escape routes for the insurgents who were about to be flushed out of the valley.

Meanwhile, snatching helicopters from other units in the area, another air assault squadron was attached to a battalion of the armor-heavy 1st Cavalry Division at Forward Operating Base Normandy, in the northern Diyala River valley. The entire force then headed south out of the FOB, some 300 soldiers in a column of tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles, Humvees and helicopters. They pushed through Moqdadiyah and plunged towards the valley.

Simultaneously, another battalion of the 1st Cav pushed northeast from Baquba in a small operation dubbed Pericles (also part of Lightning Hammer and Phantom Strike) meant to attack specific intel targets within one of the few remaining pockets of safety for insurgents in the area. The operation had the secondary effect of putting a full battalion of heavy infantry in the field at the bottom of the Diyala River valley just above Baquba, to act as an anvil for the coming operation.

The two battalions wasted no time in launching the second phase of the battle, moving towards each other from opposite ends of the valley, in a simultaneous, massive, and rapid CCR operation. In six days, the two battalions flooded 28 specific targets—including whole villages—in a fast-moving combination of ground and air assaults.

Many al Qaeda fighters appear to have had just enough warning to make good their escape. But in so doing, they were forced to abandon their new "operations center" north of Baghdad—a command post, medical clinic, scores of rockets and mortars, dozens of IEDs, and even their personal weapons.

The prospects for these fighters are not good. The north and south end of the valleys are blocked, as is the valley's western border. The eastern escape from the valley is open for them, but that leads them into a bowl of farmland that is regularly scoured by patrols from FOB Caldwell, and is ringed to the northeast by the Kurdish "wall," to the south by the Shiite "wall," and to the southwest by coalition forces operating in strength between Baghdad and Baquba. Their only solution is to travel without their weapons and explosives—the things that make them dangerous.

Meanwhile, not beset by the force limitations that constrain General Lynch south of Baghdad, General Benjamin Mixon's Multi-National Division-North has orchestrated the Lightning Hammer attack as a CCR on the pattern developed by the Marines in Anbar. Close behind the American units came units of the Iraqi Security Forces, aiming to stay, and behind them, government officials and technical advisers meant to levee the population into the organized neighborhood watch programs that have proven fatal to al Qaeda in Anbar. Planners told me that the coalition forces were greeted warmly, and locals pledged to help, as the Sunni tribes have in Anbar.

The way forward

Al Qaeda in Iraq had many initial advantages—including a message that, though false, was superficially appealing. But they never achieved national scope. They have never looked to anyone like they could actually govern a country. They never gained the open support of any foreign army. And now, after giving the people of Iraq a taste of their brutal sadism—after executing children for playing with American-donated soccer balls, after chopping the fingers off young men for smoking, after murdering entire families in front of the youngest son, so he would live to tell the tale—Al Qaeda in Iraq is more widely hated than feared.

In the words of one soft-spoken coalition planner in Baghdad, "We are demolishing them." After four long years, the coalition has finally grasped the keys to victory. Al Qaeda has begun to lose the staging areas it needs for attacks in Baghdad. Just staying alive and avoiding capture is becoming a full-time occupation for them. As security envelops Baghdad, and calm spreads along the river corridors that extend out from the capital to the furthest reaches of the country, what is already clear to many people here in Iraq will become increasingly impossible for the rest of the world to ignore.

Because they have finally learned how to protect the people of Iraq—and help them to protect themselves—the United States and its allies are winning this war. ♦

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Gentleman of Letters

How General Lee comes to life in correspondence

BY WAYNE WEI-SIANG HSIEH

Worshipped, uncomprehended and aloof,
A figure lost to flesh and blood and bones,
Frozen into a legend out of life,
A blank-verse statue—
How to humanize
That solitary gentleness and strength? . . .
A Greek proportion—and a riddle unread.
And everything that we have said is true
And nothing helps us yet to read the man . . .

Elizabeth Brown Pryor aptly uses three stanzas of Stephen Vincent Benét's *John Brown's Body* as the jumping-off point for her study of Robert E. Lee's personal life, as expressed through his private letters. If "To read the man" and "to humanize that solitary gentleness and strength" stand as the two signal purposes behind this admirable portrait of Lee, then she has succeeded, in a book refreshingly difficult to classify in terms of both genre and historiography.

Neither a conventional biography, nor a focused monograph, it stands in effect as a series of essays (or "historical excursions") on Lee's life, structured in roughly chronological fashion, and using reprinted personal letters at each essay's opening as interpretive windows into Lee's life. In the process of this examination, however, the reader also learns much about the various worlds Lee inhabited: The slaveholding planter gentry of Northern Virginia, West Point, the antebellum U.S. Army, the Army of Northern Virginia, and, finally, the post-Civil War South. Sometimes Pryor loses her way with

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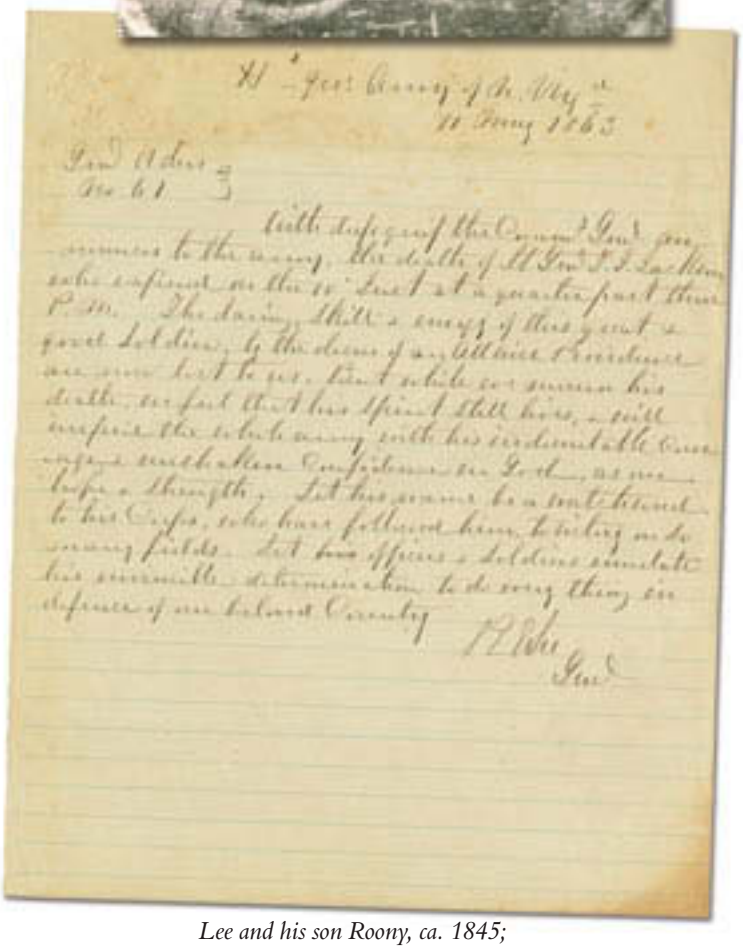

Lee and his son Roony, ca. 1845; 'General Orders' on the death of Stonewall Jackson

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regard to the larger historical context, especially in the chapters on the Civil War proper, but the work as a whole remains a humane, judicious, and graceful exposition of Robert E. Lee the man, as opposed to Robert E. Lee the symbol.

The difficulties of seeing beyond the legend of Lee can be immense. The best recent example of that legend is the cinematic portrayal of Lee in *Gods and Generals*, where Robert Duvall seems to have hoped to portray above all else Lee's well-known and historically attested dignity and gravitas. Unfortunately, even a successful portrayal of that important characteristic of Lee would still have obscured the other aspects of Lee's life: The flashes of temper, the loving family man, the genial *bon vivant* who so charmed his brother officers, and the irrepressible flirt.

For example, writing to the sister of a brother officer on her wedding night, he asked, "Did you go off well, like a torpedo cracker on Christmas morning? Do regulate me thereon in your next." For his whole adult life, including well after his marriage, Lee enjoyed the company of attractive women, who he charmed with his genial wit, handsome features, and magnetic presence. But Lee played the dashing beau with the full knowledge of his wife, and within, it seems, well-defined boundaries of propriety—in short, Robert E. Lee could be both a sensual flirt *and* a proper Virginia gentleman, all at the same time.

By using Lee's correspondence as her focal point, Pryor's book excels at capturing such fascinating daily texture in Lee's complex character. Indeed, the full quotation of the letters, with their 19th-century peculiarities of style and diction, gives the uninitiated reader an uncommon window into the historical craft of manuscript research.

For professional academic historians (Pryor does not teach history in a college setting, but is a Foreign Service officer), the joys and frustrations of reading the mail of the dead is a matter so routine, and masked by our formulaic use of citation and documentation, that most of our books efface the experiential nature of our research. Her deliberately self-conscious approach toward the presentation of that research, along with the photographic reproduction of some of the physical letters themselves—indeed, Pryor cites art historians' explication of individual objects as an inspiration—lets us, indeed, "read the man" in a fashion more direct and immediate than the conventional scholarly biography or analysis.

Although Pryor's copious endnotes show a mastery of the vast body of scholarly and non-scholarly literature on Lee, it is in this sensitive and humane portrayal of the texture of Lee's daily life that her study makes its real contribution to historical writing on Lee. The portions of Lee's life most worrisome to current sensibilities—his acceptance of slavery and the antebellum Southern social order; his frustrations with service in the antebellum Army; the questionable nature of some of his wartime decisions as commander of the Army of Northern Virginia; and his inability to realize fully the possibilities of the post-Civil War South—receive, for the most part, excellent treatment in Pryor. But most of these topics have received thorough scholarly treatment by previous biographers.

Reading the Man
A Portrait of Robert E. Lee Through His Private Letters
by Elizabeth Brown Pryor
Viking, 688 pp., $29.95

Indeed, for one period of time in the 20th century, if there was any distinguishing trend in writing on Lee, it was of revisionist debunking, best seen in the work of Thomas L. Connelly, Alan T. Nolan, and Michael Fellman. Connelly saw Lee as strategically myopic, ignoring the crucial Western theater for his own parochial Virginia; Nolan raised troubling questions regarding both Lee's departure from the regular Army and his generalship; while Fellman went so far as to find precedent for Lee's aggressiveness on the battlefield in what he saw as Lee's previous inability to fully tame his erotic impulses—one of the more spectacular abuses of psychohistory in scholarly writing on the Civil War.

From this perspective, Pryor's book is best seen as comparable to the work of Emory Thomas and my own teacher, Gary Gallagher, who, while acknowledging Lee's real foibles as both a human being and as a general, have seen some of the recent criticisms of Lee as overdrawn, downright speculative, and anachronistic.

Indeed, Pryor, while willing to make moral judgments on her subject, especially in relation to Lee's willingness to treat slaves in the same manner as the vast majority of Southern planters—as property—generally shows a deft touch when dealing with the multitude of controversies that surround Lee. Although it should be no surprise for anyone familiar with slavery as an institution that Lee had at least one runaway flogged, and broke up slave families, it bears repeating to those who have too fully imbibed the apotheosized image of Lee.

In a more original contribution to the historical literature, Pryor's exposition of the divisions within Lee's own family over secession raises profound questions regarding the conventional interpretation that Lee's resignation from the United States Army was foreordained. And while the consensus of Civil War military historians remains that Lee was, indeed, a great general, no serious military historian now sees his command decisions as flawless. Even Gallagher, perhaps Lee's most prominent current defender in the scholarly lists, is critical of Lee's decision-making at Gettysburg, although he takes pains to point out that Lee's actions were hardly without rationale or logic.

While Pryor excels at capturing the special bond between Lee and the soldiers of the Army of Northern Virginia, it is on military questions where her treatment of Lee becomes most questionable. For example, she argues that Lee's invasion of Maryland in the fall of 1862, and his invasion of Pennsylvania the following summer, led in large part to the Federal "hard war" measures that did so much to destroy the Southern

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social fabric Lee hoped to preserve.

Here, Pryor gives too much credit to Lee's effects on Northern military policy. The hard-war policies later exemplified by William T. Sherman's March to the Sea in 1864—emancipation paired with direct Federal attacks on civilian property and resources—stemmed in large part from events beyond Lee's control: The influence of Northern politics, Federal experience in the guerrilla-infested western theater, and various other factors. Indeed, Pryor misreads the divisions within Northern public opinion to a large degree, which leads her to underrate the opportunities present in Lee's campaign in Pennsylvania, exemplified best by the New York draft riots.

Her comments on the possibilities of a guerrilla or partisan strategy for Confederate independence ignore the social chaos that would have resulted, threatening both the Southern social order and Confederate generals' notions of legitimate warfare. It seems that, as Pryor widens her lens to questions of national strategy, she loses some of the sharpness and clarity that so strongly marks her image of Lee the man, as opposed to Lee the general and strategist.

Such criticism, perhaps only obligatory due to this reviewer's inclinations as a military historian most interested in Lee the warrior, should not be overstated. Good history can and should be many different things—Clio's mansion contains many rooms, each suited to the wide variety of human experience—and in Pryor's work, we find a fine room devoted to Robert E. Lee. Here we find worthy lessons, concerned not so much with generalship and high politics but in the aspirations of fallible human beings to surmount their own limitations.

As Pryor ends *Reading the Man*, "His example lies not in superhuman virtue but in human determination; not in battlefield glory but in triumph amid life's unexpected skirmishes. . . . Lee beckons us not to attain some impossible height of moral righteousness, but to be fabulous in our fallibility, to face unflinchingly all of the vicissitudes of life, and in so doing to transcend them." ♦

Cinema's Shakespeare

Ingmar Bergman, 1918-2007

BY JOHN SIMON

My 1972 book, *Ingmar Bergman Directs*, begins with a long interview. After that, the first sentence runs: "Ingmar Bergman is, in my most carefully considered opinion, the greatest filmmaker the world has seen so far." Thirty-five years later, upon news of Bergman's death last month, that is still my opinion. And an *oeuvre* that hasn't been surpassed in 35 years stands a very good chance that it will never be.

Let me put it this way now: What Shakespeare is to the theater, Bergman is to cinema. Neither of them has been or is likely to be equaled. There have been other great film directors: Fellini, whom Bergman loved; Bresson, whom Bergman selectively admired; Antonioni, whom he came to appreciate; and Renoir, who mostly left him cold. But none of them so expressed the whole human being, so encompassed human variety.

It is Bergman the completist—like Shakespeare—whom I want to address here, and show how he had it all, and not, like the best of the rest, only part.

Bergman scored bull's-eyes in almost all genres, which doesn't mean that, like all experimenters and pioneers, he escaped the occasional miss. But some benighted or uninformed souls think of him as merely a gloomy Scandinavian with no sense of humor. Wrong. *A Lesson in Love* and the brilliant elevator episode in *Waiting Women* are sheer comedy at its best; *Smiles of a Summer Night*, a great film, is serious comedy, and so even better. No less important is that, like Shakespeare, Bergman had bright moments in his darkest films, as dark ones in his lighter ones. And he never shied away from the great, tragic truths.

Biography and history excepted, Bergman tackled all genres, especially if you know his work in the theater, television, and opera. On film, he made thrillers and melodramas (early works); wonderful documentaries that he shot himself about simple people on his small island; the greatest filmed opera ever (*The Magic Flute*), horror (*Hour of the Wolf*), farce (*The Devil's Eye*, *Now About All These Women*); war, though not combat (the background in *Thirst*, *The Silence*, *Shame*), religion (*The Seventh Seal*, *Winter Light*, *Through a Glass Darkly*), family chronicle (*Wild Strawberries*, *Cries and Whispers*, *Fanny and Alexander*), the supernatural (*The Virgin Spring* and, intermittently, others), love and death (repeatedly).

He was a man who loved women, and sometimes resented them, which comes with the territory. In all his films, women figure as importantly as men, and often more so. He understood them and empathized with them; he was horrified by Hitchcock, whom he perceived as hating them. The uncut version of *Scenes from a Marriage* may be the profoundest movie treatment of man-woman relationships ever made.

He also understood and loved actors as no other director did. (Renoir, in a couple of films, approached this.) He had been, briefly, an actor, and all through his life directed theater, where the actor-director relations are closer than in film. Importantly, he had a kind of resident company of film actors on whom he could rely, and for whom he tailored his screen characters—only

John Simon writes about theater for Bloomberg News.

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Kurosawa had something vaguely resembling it.

Over and over he spoke of his fascination with the human face, which his films invariably celebrated. Other directors have made much of close-ups; in Bergman, the close-up very nearly is the film. The Swedish title of what in America became *The Magician* was *The Face.* (American titles tended to be diminishing, if not downright gross, as in *The Naked Night*.) In *Persona*, the faces of the two women merge in what may be the ultimate cinematic meditation on personhood. Of course, the choice of actors for, among other things, the expressiveness of their faces helped.

Cinematographers were picked with equal care. Bergman used Hilding Bladh, Goran Strindberg, Gunnar Fischer, and above all, Sven Nykvist, with whom he made most of his finest films. "Sven and I are like an old married couple," Bergman would say, although the two of them never socialized. They carried black-and-white cinematography to extraordinary heights, and then proceeded to even greater advances in the use of color. Think of the emotional use of color in *The Passion of Anna* and the symbolic one in *Cries and Whispers.*

Unlike most directors, Bergman wrote most of his screenplays himself. There he exhibited his superb command of dialogue, another thing that brings him close to Shakespeare. English subtitles, to be sure, rarely if ever do his language full justice. His verbal gift comes across better in translations of his later fictions and autobiographies.

What distinguishes Bergman's films fundamentally from those of nearly all other directors is the love of music, and the conscious and unconscious influence of that love on his films. Lesser directors have been influenced by paintings, still lesser ones by (usually inferior) fiction. Bergman, who loved music from Bach to Bartok, and listened to it passionately, often got ideas for his films from it—most conspicuously in *Autumn Sonata.* But even more important, his films are built on musical principles: on duration and contrasts, on rhythm and harmony—even counterpoint. His soundtracks, always respectfully sparing of music (none of those Hollywood orgies), employed the best from the past and the present, such Swedish contemporaries as Karl-Birger Blomdahl and Daniel Bortz. One of Bergman's wives was the distinguished pianist Käbi Laretei, who further developed his musical tastes and was often heard on his soundtracks or providing background music for his stage productions.

Few other filmmakers made so many movies (50-plus) and none so many masterpieces. And how well he could write or talk about them, though never in excess. It is a great pity that he did not live another year. Come next Bastille Day he would have been 90, and major celebrations and retrospectives will take place worldwide. His reactions to, and comments on, them would have provided him with the perfect exit lines, and us with a great summation. ♦

George Tenet's CIA

Picking up the pieces at Langley will be no slam dunk.

BY REUEL MARC GERECHT

On the left and the right, George Tenet has been skewered for his role in the Iraq war, and this memoir has been universally trashed.

The left sees him as part of the disingenuous Bush team that distorted intelligence to get America into an unnecessary and unwinnable war, and besmirched the nation's honor through secret prison sites, rendition, and the "aggressive" interrogation of terrorist suspects. If George Tenet had been a man of mettle, instead of a political crony, he might have prevented such folly.

At the Center of the Storm
My Years at the CIA
by George Tenet
HarperCollins, 549 pp., $30

The right attacks him for dissembling about Baathist Iraq's role in supporting terrorism and, more specifically, CIA analysis about the contacts between al Qaeda and Saddam's regime before and after 9/11. He also gets whacked for allowing, if not encouraging, the CIA to become an anti-Bush bastion, actively working against the policies of the president.

Both sides find him whiny and self-serving. Both sides give him and the CIA some credit for responding quickly to Osama bin Laden after 9/11 in Afghanistan, where the CIA provided the plans and personnel for America's first response. Left-wing and right-wing journalists generally give Tenet some credit for restoring morale at Langley, at least before Iraq bummed everybody out.

The real story of George Tenet is much worse than the usual animadversions. No other director so abysmally failed to undertake the longstanding need for reform in the CIA. No other director had such an enormous opportunity to restructure the place into an organization possibly capable of penetrating al Qaeda, clerical Iran, and other hard targets. But in operations, if not in analysis, Langley remains a decrepit institution, incapable of fulfilling basic counterterrorist, espionage, and covert-action tasks.

The Iraq war and the political controversies surrounding it have distorted the conversation in Washington. Never has intelligence been so central to foreign-policy discussions; never has the emphasis been so misplaced. "Better" CIA analysis would not have

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prevented the Iraq war; the best possible CIA analysis will have little or no impact on whether (not when) an American president decides to attack Iran's nuclear-weapons facilities.

The 2008 campaign is upon us, and we can rest assured that every serious candidate—with the possible exceptions of John McCain and Fred Thompson—will call for better American intelligence *and* more money for the CIA. (McCain has expressed serious reservations about the general competence, and ideological neutrality, of the Agency. Thompson, who was once on the Senate's intelligence oversight committee, knows the organization has unresolved systemic problems. Both men seem to know that more money is not the answer.)

The Democrats are unlikely to be so astute. Barack Obama recently suggested that he would, as president, create a "Shared Security Partnership Program" that would "forge an international intelligence and law enforcement infrastructure to take down terrorist networks from the remotest islands of Indonesia, to the sprawling cities of Africa." Obama's program could actually be a subtitle for Tenet's book, since Tenet and his CIA spent an enormous amount of time on liaison relationships, building them up (as Tenet puts it) so the United States could draw down on the "goodwill" and "trust"—and on the large amounts of cash and security goodies delivered by the CIA since 9/11.

It's a decent bet that the CIA and the Pentagon have, in the war on terror, probably already delivered at least $5 billion in goods, cash, and manpower to "allied" intelligence and internal-security services. Obama would put these "partnerships" into overdrive.

Two things are certain. First, such liaison-building has the lifespan of a tsetse fly. Throughout *At the Center of the Storm* Tenet, Vice President Cheney, and other senior officials are having to visit the Middle East—usually Pakistan and Saudi Arabia—to fortify longstanding intelligence relationships, which Tenet sees as the cornerstone of national security. It's a very good bet that the French, Germans, and Italians have kicked out of their countries more clumsy (often misdirected) CIA officers than have the Saudis, the Pakistanis, and the Egyptians.

It's also a very good bet that CIA goodies proffered to these countries are small compared with the support given to the Saudis, Pakistanis, and Egyptians. Yet the intelligence and political relationship that the United States has with the Europeans is vastly more reliable, even with the turbulence provoked by the Iraq war. Vice presidents don't have to fly off to Europe to ensure "allied" intelligence and security services act responsibly. Personal "trust" among security VIPs of various countries isn't a particularly lasting foundation; shared Western culture and self-evident mutual interest are the bonds that matter.

Second, such extra liaison cash will further fatten Langley's domestic bureaucracy and overseas stations and bases, and attenuate the CIA's espionage ethic. Clandestine human intelligence collection, if done "unilaterally," is in constant tension with any liaison relationship since unilateral espionage operations can greatly anger foreign intelligence and security services if they discover undeclared CIA operations on their soil.

Since the overwhelming number of CIA case officers serve overseas with weak official covers, and since helpful foreign internal-security services in counterterrorism tend to be accomplished in counterespionage, allied governments in the war on terror can usually shut down unilateral American operations if so inclined. It's doubtful that the CIA is actually running unilateral agents of any great note in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, or Pakistan: The environment is tough, and case officers with official cover in such places stick out like sore thumbs. And the CIA, according to active-duty case officers, remains extremely wary of deploying nonofficial cover officers (NOCs) to hostile environments. According to these same officers, the CIA has refused to develop any NOC-based counterterrorist strategy in the Middle East. But whatever the CIA is doing in these countries from official facilities could dry up if the host service wanted to get unpleasant.

An inevitable byproduct of this liaison-centered intelligence is greater CIA caution overseas. And Langley is already an enormously cautious organization. Since the death of John Michael Spann in November 2001, have we heard about any CIA deaths in Afghanistan, or Iraq, or elsewhere, in the war on terror? It's unpleasant to say this, but if the Clandestine Service were seriously engaged on the ground against our enemies, operatives would be dying and the outside world would be hearing about it. Tenet, who brags about everything conceivable in this memoir, would have anonymously underscored the deaths of CIA operatives—and would have been right to do so. He does not do so.

Tenet's character—and, more important, the character of the senior cadre that Tenet has promoted—was revealed in all its tepidness by his commentary on Michael Scheuer's recommendation to try to capture or assassinate Osama bin Laden in 1998 using friendly Afghans. The plan no doubt had great faults; but Scheuer, who was in charge of the CIA's bin Laden unit, was ahead of his time. Scheuer may be an oddball neo-isolationist, but he was unquestionably correct to recommend that we do something lethal, regardless of possible collateral damage, as soon as possible.

Tenet sided with the "pros." He writes:

> I took [Scheuer's] recommendation seriously, but six senior CIA officers stood in the chain of command between Mike and me. Most of them were seasoned operations officers, while Mike was an analyst not trained in conducting paramilitary operations.

What's striking is that Tenet still defends that decision, citing the sagacity of rank. It's doubtful that those six case officers, or the progeny they have promoted, are now any bolder. "Seasoning" in the Operations Directorate does not make men adventurous. Daniel Benjamin and Steve Simon, two counterterrorist officials on the

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Clinton National Security Council staff, recently recommended in the *New York Times* that the CIA be given responsibility for paramilitary strikes into Pakistan to kill al Qaeda personnel, since the Pentagon has proven too cautious in planning and recommending such operations. Credit goes to Benjamin and Simon for seeing past mistakes and for fearing the future, but it's unlikely that the senior cadre in the Clandestine Service's Near East Division, or even in the marginally more adventurous Counterterrorism Center, will jump at the task.

Barack Obama may discover—and Tenet's book is an excellent primer on the subject—that his favored kind of "partnership program" leads the CIA into a close—at times blinding—embrace of the intelligence and security services of the three countries Obama regularly (and correctly) criticizes for abetting the growth of Islamic extremism: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt.

The CIA and the State Department are virtual twins in their tendency toward "clientitis"—the inclination to see the world as a host country does—and the process was occurring inside the CIA before the end of the Cold War. The post-9/11 world and George Tenet accelerated the process. Under both Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, he even transformed the long-standing PLO liaison relationship into an open foreign-policy role—the first time, I believe, that any Western intelligence service has so publicly elevated itself into foreign policy and politics.

Tenet's performance here was distressing:

> I would walk into [Yasser] Arafat's headquarters and there would be forty or fifty people all talking at the same time, yelling, laughing, telling lies to each other because they didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings by telling the whole truth, and I would think to myself, This is just like the Greeks I knew growing up in Queens.

No, George: Fatah, the trailblazing mother ship of Middle Eastern terrorism, doesn't have much in common with Greek Americans. The nature and range of Fatah's mendacity are of a different species. But that Washington's political class would even think of using the CIA, which at its core is supposed to be an espionage and covert-action service, as an adjunct to the State Department tells a lot about why Washington has shown so little sustained, serious interest in ensuring that the CIA can execute its core missions.

However much one might approve of CIA officials doing what they can to solve the Israeli-Palestinian imbroglio, this Foggy Bottom trend with Langley, of a part with its growing liaison equities, does not bode well for a service tasked to penetrate the inner circles of al Qaeda. The thousands of officers being added to the CIA are *not* there for liaison work: Even when bloated, such dealings do not demand a big staff. Tenet brought a flood of new people into the CIA, and Congress paid for them, in great part to improve the quality and quantity of clandestine human-intelligence collection.

After 9/11, fear of weapons of mass destruction focused minds on the here and now, and the advantages that rough foreign security services provide the United States can be significant. But these liaison "partnerships" are not cost-free, especially when the autocrats in question have done so much to fuel anti-American Islamic radicalism. With Tenet, however, there really is no problem here since he pays the thinnest lip service in *At the Center of the Storm* to the idea of reform or self-government in the Middle East.

The lack of nuance and contradiction in his assessment of Arafat, Pakistan's Pervez Musharraf, the Saudi royals, the Hashemites of Jordan, and Hosni Mubarak ("He has a tremendous amount of wisdom, but although a serious man, he also had a lighter side") is well below the bland, standard CIA writings on these subjects: His account of the nature and evolution of Islamic radicalism takes up less than a page in a 549-page book. Yet some of America's intelligence relationships ought to become subjects of open, vigorous debate since they directly affect national security. If the Democrats want to have a debate about rendition, they should openly question the nature and depth of CIA liaison work.

Still, there is no reason to believe that Hillary Clinton wouldn't throw more cash at the CIA, either, and probably pump up liaison work. It's the easy, quick thing to do. The argument that money spent on intelligence is a pittance compared with money saved on defense is appealing to everyone, but especially to those who'd rather spend as little as possible on the military. Good intelligence, if left politically untwisted, is supposed to save us from bad wars, and much of the current Democratic critique of the Iraq war hinges on this view.

Under the Democrats, and perhaps under certain Republicans—Mitt Romney seems seriously enamored of the idea that the Clandestine Service is malnourished—the CIA is likely to grow even bigger than Tenet envisioned, and Tenet's plans had the Clandestine Service back up to Cold War levels. In an ironic twist, the intelligence contretemps surrounding the Iraq war has made Democrats more reliable supporters of the CIA than Republicans.

As an institution, the CIA has certainly tried through leaks to walk away from its formative and approving role in rendition and the aggressive interrogation of suspected terrorists. The odds are excellent that senior operational personnel were as responsible as anyone in Dick Cheney's office in devising the most controversial aspects of America's response to 9/11. Tenet does not talk about this, but you can infer from his defense of the practices that the Clandestine Service (and probably Tenet himself) were instrumental, as they were in quickly offering a blueprint for a CIA/Special Forces incursion into Afghanistan, and in putting forth the manner and methods used to prosecute the intelligence war against al Qaeda.

We're now beginning to hear stories of senior officers retiring because of their opposition to the "illegal" activi-

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ties of the Bush administration since 9/11. Buyer be warned: Case officers in general, and operatives raised in the Near East Division in particular, are not tender-hearted. They would probably much prefer to have foreigners aggressively interrogate terrorist suspects than do it themselves, but few harbor doubts about the occasional utility of rough questioning. That is one big, unspoken reason why liaison relationships with Middle Eastern regimes have grown so enormously since Islamic terrorism started targeting the United States.

If there is any real damaging politics going on at the CIA, it is here: Agency personnel, good bureaucrats that they are, don't like to be on the losing side. Since late 2003, the CIA had known that Iraq was going south: This didn't take great perceptive powers or access to classified information; officers just needed to be free from the authority of Donald Rumsfeld. Whatever loyalty the CIA as an institution may have to President Bush is countered by the institution's stronger desire to survive the Iraq war, and the dark sides of the war on terror, unscathed.

The CIA has been wrongly attacked over the 2002 National Intelligence Estimate about Iraq. Without *numerous* deep, verifiable penetrations into Saddam Hussein's inner circle, CIA analysts could not have known that Saddam had changed gears on WMD development. We know for a fact that many of Saddam's senior officials thought he still had WMD stockpiles in March 2003. Totalitarian regimes are the hardest targets—"walk-ins," volunteers, are the only way you strike gold with them—and we did not have these kind of agents against Saddam Hussein.

Take away the disputed language in the intelligence estimate, take away any allusion that any senior official may have made to an Iraqi-delivered "mushroom cloud," take away Joe Wilson IV and Niger, take away any errant Iraqi information, take away the Pentagon's Office of Special Plans, and the Senate ballot authorizing the war would not have changed by a single vote. We would still have had the powerful arguments put forth by the former Clinton official Kenneth Pollack in *The Threatening Storm*, without doubt a vastly more influential work than anything Ahmad Chalabi ever whispered into Dick Cheney's ear.

The most honest response to the intelligence estimate came initially from Hillary Clinton. She didn't read it before voting in favor of the war. She didn't need to. Over the years she and her husband had, no doubt, thoroughly discussed the evidence as we knew it. Like the larger issue of Saddam's bellicose appetite, it was damning. So it is embarrassing to see George Tenet try, *ex post facto*, to rework the language of the intelligence estimate so that more doubt is expressed. It has been similarly disheartening to see senior administration officials casting blame on the "slam-dunk" CIA director and his agency. It didn't matter then, and it doesn't matter now—except in how the affair has spooked and hyperpoliticized the CIA.

The Central Intelligence Agency has many problems, a number of which George Tenet compounded. It did not need to add poor political judgment. Once political leaking becomes routine, it's hard to break the habit, no matter who is in the White House.

So it's difficult to conceive of Langley's army of case officers doing all that much in the fight against Islamic extremism and the war in Iraq, or against Iran's nuclear-weapons program, or against China, where Langley has long had problems. *At the Center of the Storm* provides a good guide to why the CIA, when it comes to espionage and covert action, is little changed since 9/11. If there is any truth to the Democratic charge that the United States is no more safe today than before 9/11, it is in part because the CIA, the lead agency in counterterrorism, has failed to adapt to the post-9/11 world. Even before then, George Tenet put his money on liaison relationships with Middle Eastern autocracies as the best means to save us from attack. Since there is so little else at Langley to fall back on, let us hope that this time around he is right. ♦

Lust Down East

Courtship can be complicated on the coast of Maine.

BY STEFAN BECK

The countless reviews of Zachary Leader's *Life of Kingsley Amis* have made one thing clear: The reading public eagerly awaits the Second Coming of the Angry Young Man. Many decades have passed since he scorched the bedclothes in Amis's *Lucky Jim* or tumbled down a staircase, propelled by too many pink gins, in Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. Literature has grown too sleepy, too sedentary, in his long absence. Where's this rough beast been hibernating, and when's he plan on slouching toward the Bombay Sapphire to be born?

For the faithful, there's good news and bad news. First, the good: The legendary menace enjoys a sort-of reincarnation in Nathan Empson, the hapless, ill-treated young hero of Brian Groh's debut novel, *Summer People*. Nathan is an aspiring (that is, broke) graphic novelist summering in a posh Maine coast town. This is no clambake, though: He's been hired to take care of Ellen Broderick,

Stefan Beck writes on fiction for the New York Sun, *the* New Criterion, *and other publications.*

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an old and fast-fading former beauty, while beating back mind-pureeing boredom, nursing a broken heart, and trying to make sense of the locals' mounting hostility.

Nathan has plenty to be angry about. Ellen's sons haven't informed him of her medical condition. Whether it's dementia or Alzheimer's disease is left to the reader to diagnose, but it makes little difference to Ellen's unprepared, overtaxed caregiver. Nor have they warned him that many of Ellen's neighbors eye her from the wreckage of spectacularly burned bridges. Nathan takes the heat for Ellen's past sins in a crucible of class warfare and guilt-by-association: What's a Cleveland college dropout doing in our little seaside paradise, and where's he get off helping *that* woman, anyway?

His only ally in the WASP nest of Brightonfield Cove is a punk-turned-pastor named Eldwin Lowell. The "cool priest," sadly, has been made a stock character by real life if not by literature, so Groh reassures us that "Eldwin Lowell had ashen crescents beneath his blue eyes, and looked more like an overworked professor than the eager boy-man ministers Nathan had known." Eldwin, with his drinking, his depressive wife, and his Aristotelian sermons, is a mature character and never merely a mouthpiece for convenient truths. He helps Nathan through rough spots, but not even their conversations are exempt from the uneasiness that permeates nearly every exchange in *Summer People*. Some of these are memorably awkward. Here's what happens when Nathan, mistaken for someone worthier, is invited on a yacht outing:

> "I thought you were Ben Darrow's son." "Well, I'm not." Nathan smiled, not knowing what else to say. "Will you excuse me for just a minute?" Kendra said, moving through a few rows of cars to where a light blue Volvo station wagon was parked. . . . [S]he stayed two rows of cars apart from Nathan as she walked back toward the clubhouse. Maybe she was planning to talk with her friends about the confusion, to make sure that they were comfortable with the situation before inviting Nathan onto the boat, but Nathan was embarrassed by that idea, and couldn't help calling her name. Kendra stopped and raised her eyebrows as if surprised to see him still standing there.

Nathan, with humility and aplomb, lets this ugly trout off the hook, but he daydreams about "a rogue wave that would wrench the yacht to the ocean floor, but allow Kendra to escape and flail for hours before being torn apart by a shark." These asides are satisfying, but the reader could do with more of them—and with more of them said out loud, preferably accompanied by Campari-and-sodas or platters of Oysters Rockefeller hurled at the offenders with great force.

That's the bad news. Nathan is angry, but that he tries—and often manages—to keep it to himself makes *Summer People* less bracing and hilarious than it might have been. Nathan is perfectly believable as a timid romantic, absorbed by his art and his private thoughts, but it's hard not to wish he'd unleash his inner Jaws on the unsuspecting sunbathers of Brightonfield Cove.

Summer People
by Brian Groh
Ecco, 304 pp., $24.95

His pursuit of Eldwin's nanny, Leah, poses the same problem. What's become of boiling, unapologetic lust? Nathan's hides behind studied shyness and picnic baskets, portrait-sketching and red wine. Then again, he woos Leah just as one would an Abercrombie & Fitch model with a Crest WhiteStrips smile and nothing much to say.

The reader asks, "What's he see in her?"—but it's more a question of what he sees on her: a black bikini, for instance. This makes his hopeless romanticism more vexing. Nathan could at least have the indecency to tell *himself* what it is he's after. Yet he doesn't seem to notice how many of their talks hinge on the dull or idiotic: adventures in babysitting, the pros and cons of threesomes, *Angels in America*—and so his delicate Fabergé egg of a courtship rolls along toward disappointment.

Not to mention trouble. Groh's update on the mustachio-twirling villain is a bicep-flexing makeout shark named Thayer. It isn't just that this eugenics miracle provokes Nathan's physical, sexual, and financial insecurities; he's also the grandson of Ellen Broderick's romantic rival. (Readers are advised not to dwell on the implications of this AARP love triangle.) Thayer can't hit a little old lady, naturally, so guess who winds up with the hematoma?

This "battle royal," along with several other over-the-top catastrophes (one of which won't go over too well with PETA), suggests that Groh is a comic talent with tremendous growth potential. He needs to hoist the black sail more frequently and with greater ferocity.

He might also cool it on the metaphysical angst. There seems to be a troubling consensus that literature, even funny literature, must also be brooding and deep. Stretches of hilarity are interrupted with what can only be called tragic relief. At the book's end, poor Nathan "felt like he had been long oppressed by a preoccupation with happiness—*Was he happy? Was he really following his bliss?*—and felt emboldened by the prospect of learning more about Aristotle, and thinking in terms of virtue and bravery."

Cue the world's most sophisticated violin.

Brian Groh and Nathan Empson do have many wise, sometimes moving, things to say. They are particularly canny about the regret and melancholy that can accumulate over a lifetime, even one well spent, and the reader profits from that understanding. These are Thoughtful Young Men, for sure, but one suspects that they have more *Caddyshack* than *The Sorrows of Young Werther* in their blood. They shouldn't be afraid to let it out.

It's summer vacation, after all, and we were all having such a good time. ♦

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Gertrude Stein, Alice B. Toklas, and friend, 1944

PHOTO © BETTMANN/CORBIS

Romancing the Stein

An account of Gertrude and Alice that Gertrude would have liked. **BY JUDY BACHRACH**

"How had this pair of elderly Jewish lesbians survived the Nazis?" Janet Malcolm asks straightaway in *Two Lives*, which is subtitled *Gertrude and Alice*.

The first name is a reference to Gertrude Stein, an ardent deployer of automatic writing which resulted, with few exceptions, in dense and unrewarding tomes—and, more famously, a friend and collector of Picasso and Matisse whose talent and reputations far outclassed hers. The second name refers to Stein's lover, Alice B. Toklas, a bent and sour little pickle whom no one, except Gertrude, liked at all.

Two Lives
Gertrude and Alice
by Janet Malcolm
Yale, 240 pp., $25

As both ladies spent World War II in Vichy France in the village of Culoz, not far from an orphanage where the Gestapo rounded up more than 40 Jewish children who were then deported to Auschwitz where they were murdered, Malcolm asks a valid question. How did Stein and Toklas survive the ceaseless calamities inflicted on other Jews in France? The short answer is—and it will save you a world of trouble rifling through this meandering, jumbled narrative, and also $25—they sucked up to scumbags.

Had Malcolm been as forthright about her subjects, it is likely no one would care to read about them. But trust me, that's the gist of this book. You wouldn't want them as neighbors. Despite her headline status, Toklas is given only short shrift, defined as an afterthought by a contemporary, on the next-to-last page, as "a voracious, ravenous animal throwing itself on its food, eyes fixed on the other half of the bite she had just swallowed for fear it might escape." Gertrude, much better treated by the author, who waxes rapturous about her charm, had great, even prescient, taste in art, and a transient fondness for Ernest Hemingway with whom she eventually fell out. But the bottom line is: She and her sidekick were often indistinguishable from the rogues and opportunists they cultivated.

On page 52, for example, Gertrude takes a break from her 30-minutes-a-day of impenetrable writing to translate, at the behest of a friend who happened to be a French anti-Semite with excellent Vichy connections, the speeches of Marshall Pétain, France's collaborator-in-chief. It was a project she continued after the deportation of French Jews. It is also worthy of note that so close were she and her live-in companion to their Vichy friend, that when he was jailed at the end of the war, Toklas sold some Picassos to effect his escape.

No notion is too batty for Stein; none, once embraced by her, fails to rise to the level of inspired revelation. Hitler, as an Austrian, actually harbored a deep-seated hatred of Germany, she maintained, and therefore wanted to destroy that noble country by leading it to perdition. It was a conviction, Stein believed, that she felt compelled to share at a Paris dinner party where the guests "all thought I was trying to be bright but not at all it is true" [sic]. Later, she told Eric Sevareid, "Hitler will never go to war. . . . You see, he is the German romanticist."

Indeed, examined from every angle, Gertrude Stein behaves most of the time precisely like the kind of well-oiled, sour-breathed character one might, with very bad luck, meet on a neighboring barstool around midnight or, more likely, on a plane—but only after takeoff.

"Slowly and in a way it was not astonishing but slowly I was knowing that I was a genius," Gertrude confided to readers.

Interestingly, Janet Malcolm doesn't

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pause here to snicker. Far from it. She agrees entirely with Stein's opinion of herself: "She seemed to shine when she walked into a room," is her eager appraisal, "and her work, even at its most hermetic, possesses a glitter that keeps one reading long past the time when it is normal to stop reading a text that makes no sense."

Not everyone Stein encountered was quite as smitten with the senselessness of her texts. With the exception of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, a *succès d'estime* which possessed the virtue of being comprehensible—but which Malcolm, clearly appalled, claims was on Gertrude's part an act of prostitution—most of Stein's books didn't sell. Gertrude's brother Leo believed her work to be "silly twaddle" and her admirers "fatuous idiots." Nor can his criticism be chalked up to the rancor of a lesser sibling, as Malcolm seems to indicate. As she does *not* mention, Leo was, of the two, the earlier collector of Picasso, and had a time of it convincing his sister that the artist was worthy of her patronage.

But these are by no means the biography's only defects. Organization has never been Malcolm's strong suit, but here the author, possibly inspired and heartened by her subject's own disjointed ramblings, has abandoned it altogether.

Encounters with other Stein scholars (one of whom first makes and then misses an appointment, before repenting and refusing his help outright, and another of whom reports her dreams concerning Stein and Toklas, the details of which the biographer treats reverentially); the death of Stein's second white poodle seven decades ago; the notebooks and dissertations of the better informed; the memories of a Polish-born opera singer; a long-dead rabbi who happened to be an antecedent of Toklas—each of these surfaces, in order to be allotted a carefully measured dose of respectful treatment in a paragraph or a chapter, before dissolving altogether.

Nothing melds. Nothing follows. Nothing makes too much sense. Gertrude would doubtless have approved. ♦

Cheap Thrills

It doesn't take much to enthrall the prepubescent audience. **BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

What are we to make of the fact that the most successful work of popular entertainment made in this decade for children between the ages of five and 12 is a profoundly inoffensive trifle about a jock boy and a brainiac girl who find themselves starring in their high school's musical?

High School Musical
High School Musical 2
Directed by Kenny Ortega

According to some conservative critiques of popular culture, the astounding success of *High School Musical* and *High School Musical 2* shouldn't have been possible. For decades, conservatives have decried the corrupting effect of popular culture—a sexualized, hyperviolent, commercialized pop culture that dictates the clothing habits, speaking patterns, and behavior of impressionable young Americans who do not have the ability to resist its siren song. The central contention of those who make this argument is that these trends in popular culture mirror eating patterns: Just as the combination of sugar and carbs and transfats has created addictively tasty potions that are causing childhood obesity levels to spike, the sex-and-violence mash-up has an addictive allure that quashes all attempts to provide American youth with more acceptable, or at least more anodyne, entertainment.

So how, exactly, did the Disney Channel's two little musicals aimed at prepubescent kids emerge squeaky-clean and jam-packed with wholesome goodness to capture the imaginations of kids from California to Kathmandu? The makers and distributors of popular culture just haven't been trying hard enough to find something of appeal to these kids. Or trying at all.

Certainly Disney didn't try very hard when it came to *High School Musical*. When the Disney Channel debuted the original movie in January 2006, it was merely one in a series of monthly movies made for the channel. Others in the series include a thing about a boy who discovers he's part fish, a tale about a boy's basketball team at a Jewish day school and its involvement with a homeless man, and the saga of a girl who wants to play hockey on a boy's team. It's clear from how amateurish these pictures are that no one at the channel or anywhere else gave much creative thought or attention to them. *HSM* was just another throwaway product, if a more elaborate one—as evidenced by the fact that Disney hired a man named Kenny Ortega to direct it. Disney would never have engaged Ortega to direct a project it considered significant, since it had made the disastrous mistake of giving Ortega the responsibility of helming two colossally bad musicals in the 1990s (*Newsies* and *Hocus Pocus*) that both tanked at the box office.

As it happens, I watched *High School Musical* on the evening of its premiere, since as a parent of a very young child I had seen a few preview commercials for it, thought it had an engaging premise, and wondered whether it might be an unexpected sleeper. After an hour or so, I shut off the TV. *High School Musical* is so cheaply made that its set designer barely even bothered to throw a little

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tinsel and lights around in its opening scene, supposedly set at a resort on New Year's Eve. The whole movie is slapdash in this way, with an underpopulated high school setting and scenes so hurried and false that one can almost hear Ortega shouting offscreen, "Come on, people, we have to get this whole thing shot in 24 days."

The wretched numbers—written by no fewer than 12 people—evoke not Broadway show tunes but latter-day pop music. But they are so generic and feeble they make songs like Avril Lavigne's "Sk8ter Boi" and Justin Timberlake's "SexyBack" sound like Vivaldi by comparison. The routine dancing, choreographed by the egregious Ortega, would not pass muster in summer stock in Alaska. The script was written by Peter Barsocchini, whose prior claim to fame was that he helped produce the late Merv Griffin's talk show. Evidently, Barsocchini learned everything he knew about dialogue from Griffin's infamously inane exchanges with celebrity guests.

I approached *HSM* with goodwill and exited with grave disappointment. And yet I was one of the few people in America to turn the television off that night. *High School Musical* was a sensation from the moment it aired. An estimated 8 million people watched it all the way through on the evening of its debut, making it not only the highest-rated program ever to air on the Disney Channel but one of the most highly-rated programs in the history of cable television. Every time the Disney Channel has aired a repeat of the movie in the 19 months since, its ratings have soared. Disney says *High School Musical* has been viewed 70 million times in the United States since its first broadcast. The soundtrack album was the best-selling CD of 2006. More than 5 million DVDs have been sold. Disney has earned in excess of $70 million from a movie that it has aired, repeatedly, for free.

As the weeks ticked down toward the airing of the sequel, *High School Musical 2*, I began to feel optimistic again. After all, the star of both movies, 19-year-old Zac Efron, does a splendid job playing a teen heartthrob in the big-screen version of the Broadway musical *Hairspray*. But once again, I could only last an hour. *HSM 2* is, if anything, even worse than its predecessor. Set during summer vacation, the sequel tells the bland story of the jock boy's temptation away from his hard-working girlfriend toward the rich country-club owner's daughter—with the action culminating in a country-club amateur talent show.

The 'High School Musical 2' cast on 'Good Morning America'

IDA MAE ASTUTE / © ABC / COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION

Disney spent a few more dollars on the new one than on the last, and so the cinematography came out a little brighter and the settings better dressed. But everything else is as it was: horrible songs, lamentable choreography, and dreadful overacting from all concerned. But when the sequel debuted in the middle of August, it became the highest-rated program ever to air on cable television.

It's not enough to explain away my critical reaction to the two *HSM*s by saying they were not intended for adult viewing. That's certainly true; but most of my daughter's picture books aren't intended for me, either, and I am able to see what's cute about them. No, the success of the *High School Musical*s is a mark not of their quality but of how starved little kids are for entertainments that don't require them to assume a false affect of sophistication—a sophistication they do not possess, and whose assumption is both tiring and confusing to them.

High School Musical is a movie for little kids about teenagers. It's a depiction of the high school years as a young child would wish them to be: Snazzy and colorful, playful and unthreatening. The cute couple never even exchanges a kiss in the first one, and there's a running gag in the second one about how they keep getting interrupted in their efforts to smooch. The atmosphere is so desexualized that we are supposed to accept the idea that a brother and sister can play the leads in school musicals together—a virtual impossibility, as the leads in musicals are always romantically entwined.

This is an easy formula to duplicate. The fact that no one has duplicated it since January 2006, except for the Disney Channel in making *High School Musical 2*, is indicative of a massive blind spot in Hollywood. One always hears that Hollywood makes its choices based not on ideology or a set of fashionable ideas but on what will sell. Now we know that appealing to the presexual fantasies of prepubescent children about the easy and uncomplicated nature of life after puberty is the path to a guaranteed blockbuster. And nobody in Hollywood is making bank on it because, I think, they just can't imagine it's actually true. ♦

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"Jenna Bush, one of President George W. Bush's twin daughters, is engaged to be married to her longtime boyfriend, Henry Hager, the White House announced Thursday."
—Associated Press, August 16, 2007

Parody

AY, JUNE 13, 2008 ONE DOLLAR CHEAP

ON EVE OF WEDDING, DOUBTS OVER DURATION OF CEREMONY, NUMBER OF WAITERS NEEDED

No Timetable for Open Bar—'Worst-Planned' Since Nixon

By SARAH ABBRUZZESE and ADAM CLYMER

Less than 24 hours before Jenna Bush and Henry Hager exchange their wedding vows in the Rose Garden, several White House staffers and outside experts are expressing grave concern that the ceremony could turn into a "fiasco" and describe the planning as "ill-advised" and "incomplete." Approximately 400 guests are expected to attend tomorrow's nuptials, but according to sources, the number of servers hired to plate the food and pour the drinks is insufficient.

Experts fear there is no well-defined end to the reception. "How long will the waiters have to work? How long will the bartenders have to be on duty?" asked Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations. "The president has not made clear when the musicians can go home to their families, some of whom live as far away as Rockville and Manassas."

According to Illinois senator Barack Obama, "Everyone knows you need a timetable for the buffet. Otherwise the president's guests will linger indefinitely." The presidential hopeful added, "I'm sure the staff will do a great job and we owe a debt of gratitude to them, but the American people need to know the exact time the dancing will end."

Massachusetts senator John Kerry—himself a decorated veteran of two weddings—recently stirred a minicontroversy after telling a group of high school students that if they did not "study hard, you'll get stuck catering a wedding." But his senior colleague, Senator Ted Kennedy, came to Kerry's defense, saying, "Like me, he's been there more than once. The man knows what wedding receptions are like. The best man's toast has been seared into his memory."

Robert Dennis Dwyer for Worldwide Image

Jenna Bush, daughter of President George W. Bush, and then-boyfriend Henry Hager at the White House in May, 2007

At a press conference last week, White House spokesperson Dana Perino stressed the president would not abandon his guests until each one is fed and has had enough time to mingle. "The wait staff are prepared to serve for three hours, five hours, seven hours or more, if necessary," she said. "If the servers decided to just leave in the middle of the father-daughter dance or during the cutting of the cake, chaos would ensue."

Nevertheless, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid predicts the entire affair "will quickly become a quagmire" and staunchly declared, "this wedding is

Continued on Page A8

Chris Dodd Surges Ahead In Latest Polls

the weekly Standard
SEPTEMBER 3, 2007

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